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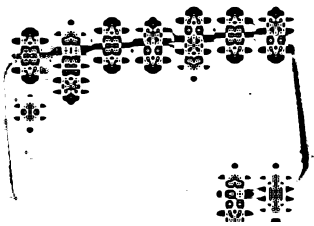
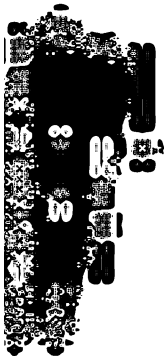
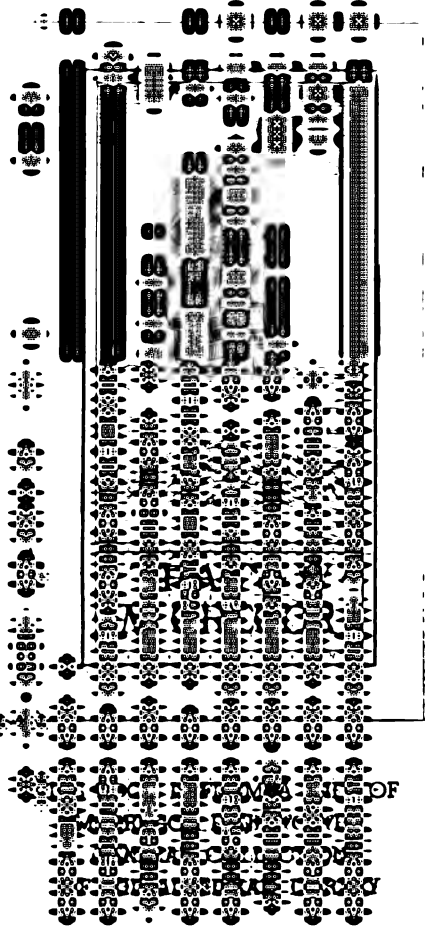
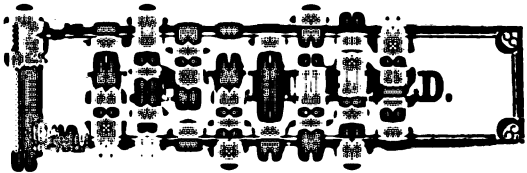
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CRITICAL MISCELLANIES.

CRITICAL
MISCELLANIES.

BY
JOHN MORLEY.

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VIRTVIR
AIRSAY TO

NOTE.

OF the papers contained in the present volume, that on Some Greek Conceptions of Social Growth is now published for the first time. The others have already appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*. They have since then undergone revision, and the essays on Vauvenargues, Mr. Carlyle, and Byron, have been largely amplified.

January, 1871.

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ERRATUM.

On p. 224, line 12, for 'jibes' read 'gibes.'

VAUVENARGUES.

VAUVENARGUES.

ONE of the most important phases of French thought in the great century of its illumination is only thoroughly intelligible, on condition that in studying it we keep constantly in mind the eloquence, force, and genius of Pascal. He was the greatest and most influential representative of that way of viewing human nature and its circumstances, which it was one of the characteristic glories of the eighteenth century to have rebelled against and rejected. More than a hundred years after the publication of the *Pensées*, Condorcet thought it worth while to prepare a new edition of them, with annotations protesting, not without a certain unwonted deference of tone, against Pascal's doctrine of the base and desperate estate of man. Voltaire also had them reprinted with notes of his own, written in the same spirit of vivacious deprecation, which we may be sure would have been even more vivacious, if Voltaire had not remembered that he was speaking of the mightiest of the enemies of the Jesuits. Apart from formal and specific dissents like these, all the writers who had drunk most deeply of the spirit of the eighteenth century, lived in a constant ferment of revolt against the clear-witted and vigorous thinker of the century before, who had clothed mere theological mysteries with the force and importance of strongly entrenched propositions in a consistent philosophy.

The resplendent fervour of Bossuet's declamations upon the nothingness of kings, the pitifulness of mortal aims, the crushing ever-ready grip of the hand of God upon the purpose and

faculty of man, rather filled the mind with exaltation than really depressed or humiliated it. From Bossuet to Pascal is to pass from the solemn splendour of the church to the chill of the crypt. Besides, Bossuet's attitude was professional, in the first place, and it was purely theological, in the second; so the main stream of thought flowed away and aside from him. To Pascal it was felt necessary that there should be reply and vindication, whether in the shape of deliberate and published formulas, or in the reasoned convictions of the individual intelligence working privately; and a syllabus of the radical articles of the French creed of the eighteenth century would consist largely of the contradictions of the main propositions of Pascal. The old theological idea of the fall was hard to endure, but the idea of the fall was clenched by such general laws of human nature as this, that 'men are so necessarily mad, that it would be to be mad by a new form of madness not to be mad;' that man is nothing but masquerading, lying, and hypocrisy, both in what concerns himself and in respect of others, wishing not to have the truth told to himself, and shrinking from telling it to anybody else;¹ that the will, the imagination, the disorders of the body, the thousand concealed infirmities of the intelligence, conspire to reduce our discovery of justice and truth to a process of haphazard, in which we more often miss the mark than hit.² Pleasure, ambition, industry, are only means of distracting men from the otherwise unavoidable contemplation of their own misery. How speak of the dignity of the race and its history, when a grain of sand in Cromwell's bladder altered the destinies of a kingdom, and if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter the whole surface of the earth would be different? Imagine, in a word, 'a number of men in chains, and all condemned to death, some of

(1) *Pensées*, i. v. 8.

(2) i. vi. 16.

them each day being butchered in sight of the others, while those who remain watch their own condition in that of their fellows, and eying one another in anguish and without hope, wait their turn ; such is the situation of man.'¹

It was hardly possible to push the tragical side of the verities of life beyond this, and there was soon an instinctive reaction towards realities. The sensations with their conditions of pleasure no less than of pain ; the intelligence with its energetic aptitudes for the discovery of protective and fruitful knowledge ; the affections with their large capacities for giving and receiving delight ; the spontaneous inner impulse towards action and endurance in the face of outer circumstances ;—all these things reassured men, and restored in theory to them with ample interest what in practice they had never lost, a rational faith and exultation in their own faculties, both of finding out truth, and of feeling a very substantial degree of happiness. On this side too, as on the other, speculation went to its extreme limit. The hapless and despairing wretches of Pascal were transformed by the votaries of perfectibility into bright beings not any lower than the angels. Between the two extremes there was one great moralist who knew how to hold a just balance, perceiving that language is the expression of relations and proportions, that when we speak of virtue and genius we mean qualities that compared with those of mediocre souls deserve these high names, that greatness and happiness are relative terms, and that there is nothing to be said of the estate of man except relatively. This moralist was Vauvenargues.

Vauvenargues was born of a good Provençal stock at Aix, in the year 1715. He had scarcely any of that kind of education

(1) *Pensées*, i. vii. 6.

which is usually performed in school-classes, and he was never able to read either Latin or Greek. Such slight knowledge as he ever got of the famous writers among the ancients was in translations. Of English literature, though its influence and that of our institutions were then becoming paramount in France, and though he had a particular esteem for the English character, he knew only the writings of Locke and Pope, and the *Paradise Lost*.¹ Vauvenargues must be added to the list of thinkers and writers whose personal history shows, what men of letters are in a conspiracy to make us forget, that for sober, healthy, and robust meditation upon human nature and life, active and sympathetic contact with men in the transaction of the many affairs of their daily life is a better preparation than any amount of wholly meditative seclusion. He is also one of the many who show that a weakly constitution of body is not incompatible with fine and energetic qualities of mind, even if it be not actually friendly to them. Nor was feeble health any disqualification for the profession of arms. As arms and the church were the only alternatives for persons of noble birth, Vauvenargues, choosing the former, became a sub-altern in the King's Own Regiment at the age of twenty (1735). Here in time he saw active service; for in 1740 the death of Charles VI. threw all Europe into confusion, and the French Government, falling in with the prodigious designs of the Marshal Belle-Isle and his brother, took sides against Maria Theresa, and supported the claims of the unhappy Elector of Bavaria, afterwards the Emperor Charles VII. The disasters which fell upon France in consequence are well known. The forces despatched to Bavaria and Bohemia, after the brief triumph of the capture of Prague, were gradually overwhelmed

(1) M. Gilbert's edition of the Works and Correspondence of Vauvenargues (2 vols. Paris: Furne, 1857), ii. 133.

without a single great battle, and it was considered a signal piece of good fortune when in the winter of 1742-3 Belle-Isle succeeded, with a loss of half his men, in leading by a long circuit, in the view of the enemy, and amid the horrors of famine and intense frost, some thirteen thousand away from Prague. The King's Regiment took part in the Bohemian campaign, and in this frightful march which closed it; Vauvenargues with the rest.

To physical sufferings during two winters was added the distress of losing a comrade to whom he was deeply attached, and who had perished in the spring of '42 under the hardships of the war. The *éloge* in which Vauvenargues commemorates the virtues and the pitiful fate of his friend, is too deeply marked with the florid and declamatory style of youth to be pleasing to a more ripened taste.¹ He complained that nobody who had read it observed that it was *touching*, not remembering that even the most tender feeling fails to touch us, when it has found stilted and turgid expression. Delicacy and warmth of affection were prominent characteristics in Vauvenargues. Perhaps if his life had been passed in less severe circumstances, this fine susceptibility might have become fanciful and morbid. As it was, he loved his friends with a certain patient sweetness and equanimity, in which there was never the faintest tinge of fretfulness, caprice, exacting vanity, or any of those other vices which betray in men the excessive consciousness of their own personality, that lies at the root of most of the obstacles in the way of an even and humane life. His nature had such depth and quality that the perpetual untowardness of circumstance left no evil print upon him; hardship made him not sour, but patient and wise, and there is no surer sign of noble temper.

The sufferings and bereavements of war were not his only

(1) *Eloge de P. H. de Seytres. Œuvres*, i. 141—150.

trials. He was beset throughout the whole of his short life with the sordid and humiliating embarrassments of narrow means. His letters to Saint-Vincens, the most intimate of his friends, disclose the straits to which he was driven. The nature of these straits is an old story all over the world, and Vauvenargues did the same things that young men in want of money have generally done. It cannot be said, I fear, that he passed along those miry ways without some defilement. He bethinks him on one occasion that a rich neighbour has daughters. 'Why should I not undertake to marry one of them within two years, with a reasonable dowry, if he would lend me the money I want, and provided I should not have repaid it by the time fixed?'¹ We must make allowance for the youth of the writer, and for a different view of marriage and its significance from our own. Even then there remains something to regret. Poverty, wrote Vauvenargues, in a maxim smacking unwontedly of commonplace, cannot debase strong souls, any more than riches can elevate low souls.² That depends. If poverty means pinching and fretting need of money, it may not debase the soul in any vital sense, but it is very likely to wear away a very priceless kind of delicacy in a man's estimate of human relations and their import.

Vauvenargues has told us what he found the life of the camp. Luxurious and indolent living, neglected duties, discontented sighing after the delights of Paris, the exaltation of rank and mediocrity, and an insolent contempt for merit; these were the characteristics of the men in high military place. The lower officers, meantime, were overwhelmed by an expenditure that the luxury of their superiors introduced and encouraged; and they were speedily driven to retire by the disorder of their affairs or by the impossibility of promotion, because

(1) *Œuvres*, ii. 233. See too p. 267.

(2) No. 579, l. 455.

men of spirit could not long endure the sight of flagrant injustice, and because those who labour for fame cannot tie themselves to a condition where there is nothing to be gathered but shame and humiliation.¹

To these considerations of an extravagant expenditure and the absence of every chance of promotion was added, in the case of Vauvenargues, the still more powerful drawback of irretrievably broken health. The winter-march from Prague to Egra had sown fatal seed. His legs had been frost-bitten, and before they could be cured he was seized with small-pox, which left him disfigured and almost blind. So, after a service of nine years, he quitted military life (1744). He vainly solicited employment as a diplomatist. The career was not yet open to the talents, and in the memorial which Vauvenargues drew up he dwelt less on his conduct than on his birth, being careful to show that he had an authentic ancestor who was Governor of Hyères in the early part of the fourteenth century.² But the only road to employment lay through the court. The claims even of birth counted for nothing, unless they were backed by favour among the ignoble creatures who haunted Versailles. For success it was essential to be not only high-born, but a parasite as well. 'Permit me to assure you, sir,' Vauvenargues wrote courageously to Amelot, then the minister, 'that it is this moral impossibility for a gentleman with only zeal to commend him of ever reaching the King his master, which causes the discouragement that is observed among the nobility of the provinces, and which extinguishes all ambition.'³ Amelot, to oblige Voltaire, eager as usual in good offices for his friend, answered the letters which Vauvenargues wrote, and promised to lay his name before the King as soon as a favourable opportunity should present itself.⁴

(1) *Réflexions sur divers sujets*, i. 104. (2) ii. 249. (3) ii. 265. (4) ii. 266.

Vauvenargues was probably enough of a man of the world to take fair words of this sort at their value, and he had enough of qualities that do not belong to the man of the world to enable him to confront the disappointment with cheerful fortitude. 'Misfortune itself,' he had once written, 'has its charms in great extremities; for this opposition of fortune raises a courageous mind, and makes it collect all its forces that before were unemployed: it is in indolence and littleness that virtue suffers, when a timid prudence prevents it from rising in flight and forces it to creep along in bonds.'¹ He was true to the counsel which he had thus given years before, and with the consciousness that death was rapidly approaching, and that all hope of advancement in the ordinary way was at an end, even if there were any chance of his life, he persevered in his project of going to Paris, there to earn the fame which he instinctively felt that he had it in him to achieve. Neither scantiness of means nor the vehement protests of friends and relations, who are always the worst foes to superior character on critical occasions, could detain him in the obscurity of Provence; and in 1745 he took up his quarters in Paris in a humble house near the School of Medicine. Literature had not yet acquired that importance in France which it was so soon to obtain. The Encyclopædia was still unconceived, and the momentous work which that famous design was to accomplish, of organising the philosophers and men of letters into an army with banners, was still unexecuted. Voltaire, indeed, had risen, if not to the full height of his reputation, yet high enough both to command the admiration of people of quality, and to be the recognised chief of the new school of literature and thought. Voltaire had been struck by a letter which Vauvenargues, then unknown to him, had sent containing a criticism in which Corneille was dis-

(1) *Conseils à un Jeune Homme*, i. 124.

advantageously compared with Racine. Coming from a young officer, the member of a profession which Voltaire frankly described as 'very noble, in truth, but slightly barbarous,' this criticism was peculiarly striking. A great many years afterwards Voltaire was surprised in the same way, to find that an officer could write such a book as the *Félicité Publique* of the Marquis de Chastellux. He replied with many compliments, and thought it worth while to point out with a good deal of pains the injustice which the young critic had done to the great author of *Ciana*. *It is the part of a man like you*, he said admirably, *to have preferences, but no exclusions*.¹ The correspondence thus begun was kept up with ever-growing warmth and mutual respect. 'If you had been born a few years earlier,' Voltaire wrote to him, 'my works would be worth all the more for it; but at any rate, even at the close of my career, you confirm me in the path that you pursue.'²

The personal impression was as fascinating as that which had been conveyed by Vauvenargues' letters. Voltaire took every opportunity to visit his unfortunate friend, then each day drawing nearer to the grave. Men of humbler stature were equally attracted. 'It was at this time,' says the light-hearted Marmontel, 'that I first saw at home the man who had a charm for me beyond all the rest of the world, the good, the virtuous, the wise Vauvenargues. Cruelly used by nature in his body, he was in soul one of her rarest masterpieces. I seemed to see in him Fénelon weak and suffering. I could make a good book of his conversations, if I had had a chance of collecting them. You see some traces of it in the selection that he has left of his thoughts and meditations. But all eloquent and full of feeling as he is in his writings, he was

(1) ii. 252.

(2) ii. 272.

even more so still in his conversation.'¹ Marmontel was stricken by sincere grief when Vauvenargues died, and in the Epistle to Voltaire expressed his sorrow in some fair lines, containing the happy phrase applied to Vauvenargues, *ce cœur stoïque et tendre*.²

In religious sentiment Vauvenargues was out of the groove of his time. That is to say, he was not unsusceptible of it. Accepting no dogma, so far as we can judge, and complying with no observances, very faint and doubtful as to even the fundamentals—God, immortality, and the like—he never partook of the furious and bitter antipathy of the best men of that century against the church, its creeds, and its book. At one time, as will be seen from a passage which will be quoted by-and-by, his leanings were towards that vague and indefinable doctrine which identifies God with all the forces and their manifestations in the universe. Afterwards even this adumbration of a theistic explanation of the world seems to have passed from him, and he lived, as many other not bad men have lived, with that fair working substitute for a religious doctrine which is provided by the tranquil search, or the acceptance in a devotional spirit, of all larger mortal experiences and higher human impressions. There is a *Meditation on the Faith*, including a Prayer, among his writings; and there can be little doubt, in spite of Condorcet's incredible account of the circumstances of its composition, that it is the expression of what was at the time a sincere feeling.³ It is, however, rather the straining and ecstatic rhapsody of one who ardently seeks faith, than the calm and devout assurance of him who already

(1) *Mémoires de Marmontel*, vol. i. 189.

(2) The reader of Marmontel's Memoirs will remember the extraordinary and grotesque circumstances under which a younger brother of Mirabeau (of *l'ami des hommes*, that is, appealed to the memory of Vauvenargues. See vol. i. 256—260.

(3) *Œuvres*, i. 225—32.

possesses it. Vauvenargues was religious by temperament, but he could not entirely resist the intellectual influences of the period. The one fact delivered him from dogma and superstition, and the other from scoffing and harsh unspirituality. He saw that apart from the question of the truth or falsehood of its historic basis, there was a balance to be struck between the consolations and the afflictions of the faith.¹ Practically he was content to leave this balance unstruck, and to pass by on the other side. Scarcely any of his maxims concern religion. One of the few is worth quoting, where he says, 'The strength or weakness of our belief depends more on our courage than our light; not all those who mock at auguries have more intellect than those who believe in them.'²

The end came in the spring of 1747, when Vauvenargues was no more than thirty-two. Perhaps in spite of his physical miseries, these two years in Paris were the least unhappy time in his life. He was in the great centre where the fame which he longed for was earned and liberally awarded. A year of intercourse with so full and wide and brilliant a mind as Voltaire's, must have been more to one so appreciative of mental greatness as Vauvenargues than many years of intercourse with subalterns in the Regiment of the King. With death, now known to be very near at hand, he had made his account before. 'To execute great things,' he had written in a maxim which gained the lively praise of Voltaire, 'a man must live as though he had never to die.' This mood was common among the Greeks and Romans; but the religion which Europe accepted in the time of its deepest corruption and depravation, retained the mark of its dismal origin nowhere so strongly as in the distorted prominence which it gave in the minds of its votaries to the dissolution of the body. It was

(1) *Letter to Saint-Vincens*, ii. 146.

(2) No. 318.

one of the first conditions of the Revival of Reason that the dreary *memento mori* and its hateful emblems should be deliberately effaced. 'The thought of death,' said Vauvenargues, 'leads us astray, because it makes us forget to live.' He did not understand living in the sense which the dissolute attach to it. The libertinism of his regiment called no severe rebuke from him, but his meditative temper drew him away from it even in his youth. It is not impossible that if his days had not been cut short, he might have impressed Parisian society with ideas and a sentiment, that would have left to it all its cheerfulness, and yet prevented that laxity which so fatally weakened it. Turgot, the only other conspicuous man who could have resisted the license of the time, had probably too much of that austerity which is in the fibre of so many great characters, to make any moral counsels he might have given widely effective.

Vauvenargues was sufficiently free from all taint of the pedagogue or the preacher to have dispelled the sophisms of license, less by argument than by the gracious attraction of virtue in his own character. The stock moralist, like the commonplace orator of the pulpit, fails to touch the hearts of men or to affect their lives, for lack of delicacy, of sympathy, and of freshness; he attempts to compensate for this by excess of emphasis, and that more often disgusts us than persuades. Vauvenargues, on the other hand, is remarkable for delicacy and half-reserved tenderness; everything he has said is coloured and warmed with feeling for the infirmities of men. He writes not merely as an analytical outsider. Hence, unlike most moralists, he is no satirist. He had borne the burdens. 'The looker-on,' runs one of his maxims, 'softly lying in a carpeted chamber, inveighs against the soldier, who passes winter nights on the river's edge, and keeps watch in silence over the safety

of the land.’¹ Vauvenargues had been something very different from the safe and sheltered critic of other men’s battles, and this is the secret of the hold which his words have upon us. They are real, with the reality that can only come from two sources ; from high poetic imagination, which Vauvenargues did not possess, or else from experience of life acting on and strengthening a friendly nature. ‘The cause of most books of morality being so insipid is,’ he says, ‘that their authors are not sincere ; is that, being feeble echoes of one another, they could not venture to publish their own real maxims and private sentiments.’² One of the secrets of his own freedom from this ordinary insipidity of moralists was his freedom also from their pretentiousness and insincerity.

Besides these positive merits, he had, as we have said, the negative distinction of never being emphatic. His sayings are nearly always moderate and persuasive, alike in sentiment and in phrase. Sometimes they are almost tentative in the diffidence of their turn. Compared with him La Rochefoucauld’s manner is hard, and that of La Bruyère sententious. In the moralist who aspires to move and win men by their best side instead of their worst, to which the appeal is so usually made, the absence of this hardness and the presence of a certain lambency and play even in the exposition of truths of perfect assurance, are essential conditions of psychagogic quality. In religion the law does not hold equally, and the contagion of fanaticism is usually most rapidly spread by a rigorous and cheerless example.

We may notice in passing that Vauvenargues has the defects of his qualities, and that with his aversion to emphasis was bound up a certain inability to appreciate even grandeur and originality, if they were too strongly and boldly marked.

(1) No. 223.

(2) No. 300.

‘It is easy to criticise an author,’ he has said, ‘but hard to estimate him.’¹ This was never more unfortunately proved than in the remarks of Vauvenargues himself upon the great Molière. There is almost a difficulty in forgiving a writer who can say that ‘La Bruyère, animated with nearly the same genius, painted the crookedness of men with as much truth and as much force as Molière; but I believe that there is more eloquence and more elevation to be found in La Bruyère’s images.’² Without at all undervaluing La Bruyère, one of the acutest and finest of writers, we may ask if this is not an incredible piece of criticism? Quite as unhappy is the preference given to Racine over Molière, not merely for the conclusion arrived at, but for the reasons on which it is founded. Molière’s subjects, we read, are low, his language negligent and incorrect, his characters bizarre and eccentric. Racine, on the other hand, takes sublime themes, presents us with noble types, and writes with elegance and simplicity. It is not enough to concede to Racine the glory of art, while giving to Molière or Corneille the glory of genius. ‘When people speak of the art of Racine, the art which puts things in their place; which characterises men, their passions, manners; genius; which banishes obscurities, superfluities, false brilliances; which paints nature with fire, sublimity, and grace; what can we think of such art as this, except that it is the genius of extraordinary men, and the origin of those rules that writers without genius embrace with so much zeal and so little success?’³ And it is certainly true that the art of Racine implied genius. The defect of the criticism lies, as usual, in a failure to see that there is glory enough in both; in the art of highly-finished composition and presentation, and in the art of bold and striking creation. Yet Vauvenargues was able to discern the secret

(1) No. 264. (2) *Réflexions Critiques sur Quelques Poètes*, i. 237. (3) i. 248.

of the popularity of Molière, and the foundation of the common opinion that no other dramatist had carried his own kind of art so far as Molière had carried his; 'the reason is, I fancy, that he is more natural than any of the others, and this is an important lesson for everybody who wishes to write.'¹ He did not see how nearly everything went in this concession, that Molière was above all natural. With equal truth of perception he condemned the affectation of grandeur lent by the French tragedians to classical personages who were in truth simple and natural, as the principal defect of the national drama, and the common rock on which their poets made shipwreck.² Let us, however, rejoice for the sake of the critical reputation of Vauvenargues that he was unable to read Shakespeare. One for whom Molière is too eccentric, grotesque, inelegant, is not likely to do much justice to the mightiest but most irregular of all dramatists.

A man's prepossessions in dramatic poetry, supposing him to be cultivated enough to have any prepossessions, furnish the most certain clue that we can get to the spirit in which he inwardly regards character and conduct. The uniform and reasoned preference which Vauvenargues had for Racine over Molière and Corneille, was only the transfer to art of that balanced, moderate, normal, and emphatically harmonious temper, which he brought to the survey of human nature. Excess was a condition of thought, feeling, and speech, that in every form was disagreeable to him; alike in the gloom of Pascal's reveries, and in the inflation of speech of some of the heroes of Corneille. He failed to relish even Montaigne as he ought to have done, because his method was too prolix, his scepticism too universal, his egoism too manifest, and because he did not produce complete and artistic wholes.³

(1) *Réflexions Critiques sur Quelques Poètes*, i. 238. (2) i. 243. (3) *Œuvres*, i. 275.

Reasonableness is the strongest mark in his thinking; balance, evenness, purity of vision, penetration finely toned with indulgence. He is never betrayed into criticism of men from the point of view of immutable first principles. Perhaps this was what the elder Mirabeau meant when he wrote to Vauvenargues, who was his cousin, 'You have the English genius to perfection,' and what Vauvenargues meant when he wrote of himself to Mirabeau, 'Nobody in the world has a mind less French than I.'¹ These international comparisons are among the least fruitful of literary amusements, even when they happen not to be extremely misleading; as when, for example, Voltaire called Locke the English Pascal, a description which can only be true on condition that the qualifying adjective is meant to strip either Locke or Pascal of most of his characteristic traits. And if we compare Vauvenargues with any of our English aphoristic writers, there is not resemblance enough to make the contrast instructive. The obvious truth is that in this department our literature is particularly weak, while French literature is particularly strong in it. With the exception of Bacon, we have no writer of apophthegms of the first order; and the difference between Bacon as a moralist and Pascal or Vauvenargues, is the difference between Polonius's famous discourse to Laertes and the soliloquy of Hamlet. His precepts refer rather to external conduct and worldly fortune, than to the inner composition of character, or to the 'wide, grey, lampless' depths of human destiny. We find the same national characteristic, though on an infinitely lower level, in Franklin's oracular saws. Among the French sages a psychological element is predominant, as well as an occasional transcendent loftiness of feeling, not to be found in Bacon's wisest maxims, and which from his point of view in their composition

(1) *Correspondance. Œuvres*, ii. 131 and 207.

we could not expect to find there. We seek in vain amid the positivity of Bacon, or the quaint and timorous paradox of Browne, or the acute sobriety of Shaftesbury, for any of that poetic pensiveness which is strong in Vauvenargues, and reaches tragic heights in Pascal.¹ Addison may have the delicacy of Vauvenargues, but it is a delicacy that wants the stir and warmth of feeling. It seems as if with English writers poetic sentiment naturally sought expression in poetic forms, while the Frenchmen of nearly corresponding temperament were restrained within the limits of prose by reason of the vigorously prescribed stateliness and stiffness of their verse at that time. A man in this country with the quality of Vauvenargues, with his delicacy, tenderness, elevation, would have composed lyrics. We have undoubtedly lost much by the laxity and irregularity of our verse, but as undoubtedly we owe to its freedom some of the most perfect and delightful of the minor figures that adorn the noble gallery of English poets.

It would be an error to explain the superiority of the great French moralists by supposing in them a fancy and imagination too defective for poetic art. It was the circumstances of the national literature during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which made Vauvenargues, for instance, a composer of aphorisms, rather than a moral poet like Pope. Let us remember some of his own most discriminating words. 'Who has more imagination,' he asks, 'than Bossuet, Montaigne, Descartes, Pascal, all of them great philosophers? Who more judgment and wisdom than Racine, Boileau, La Fontaine, Molière, all of them poets full of genius? *It is not true, then,*

(1) Long-winded and tortuous and difficult to seize as Shaftesbury is as a whole, in detached sentences he shows marked aphoristic quality, *e.g.*, 'The most ingenious way of becoming foolish is by a system;' 'The liker anything is to wisdom, if it be not plainly the thing itself, the more directly it becomes its opposite.'

that the ruling qualities exclude the others ; on the contrary, they suppose them. I should be much surprised if a great poet were without vivid lights on philosophy, at any rate moral philosophy, and it will very seldom happen for a true philosopher to be totally devoid of imagination.'¹ With imagination in the highest sense Vauvenargues was not largely endowed, but he had as much as is essential to reveal to one that the hard and sober-judging faculty is not the single, nor even the main element, in a wise and full intelligence. 'All my philosophy,' he wrote to Mirabeau, when only four or five and twenty years old, an age when the intellect is usually most exigent of supremacy, 'all my philosophy has its source in my heart.'²

In the same spirit he had well said that there is more cleverness in the world than greatness of soul, more people with talent than with lofty character.³ Hence some of the most peculiarly characteristic and impressive of his aphorisms ; that famous one, for instance, *Great thoughts come from the heart*, and the rest which hang upon the same idea. 'Virtuous instinct has no need of reason, but supplies it.' 'Reason misleads us more often than nature.' 'Reason does not know the interests of the heart.' 'Perhaps we owe to the passions the greatest advantages of the intellect.' Sayings, which are only true on condition that instinct and nature and passion have been already moulded under the influence of reason ; just as this other saying, which won the warm admiration of Voltaire, 'Magnanimity owes no account to prudence of its motives,' is only true, on condition that by magnanimity we understand a mood not out of accord with the loftiest kind of prudence. But in the eighteenth century reason and prudence were words current in their lower and narrower sense, and thus one coming like Vauvenargues to see this lowness

(1) No. 278 (i. 411).

(2) *Œuvres*, ii. 115.

(3) i. 87.

and narrowness, sought to invest ideas and terms that in fact only involved modifications of these, with a significance of direct antagonism. Magnanimity was contrasted inimically with prudence, and instinct and nature were made to thrust from their throne reason and reflection. Carried to its limit, this tendency developed the speculative and social excesses of the great sentimental school. In Vauvenargues it was only the moderate, just, and most seasonable protest of a fine observer, against the supremacy among ideals of a narrow, deliberative, and calculating spirit.

His exaltation of virtuous instinct over reason is in a curious way parallel to Burke's memorable exaltation over reason of prejudice. 'Prejudice,' said Burke, 'previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts; through just prejudice his duty becomes a part of his nature.'¹ What Burke designated as prejudice, Vauvenargues less philosophically styled virtuous instinct; each meant precisely the same thing, though the difference of phrase implied a different view of its origin and growth; and the side opposite to each of them was the same—namely, a sophisticated and over-refining intelligence, narrowed to the consideration of particular circumstances as they presented themselves.

Translated into the modern equivalent, the heart, nature, instinct, of Vauvenargues mean *character*. He insisted upon spontaneous impulse as a condition of all greatest thought and action. Men think and work on the highest level when they move without conscious and deliberate strain after virtue—when, in other words, their habitual motives, aims, methods,

(1) *Reflections on the French Revolution*, Works (ed. 1842), i. 414.

their character, in short, naturally draw them into the region of what is virtuous. '*It is by our ideas that we ennoble our passions or we debase them; they rise high or sink low according to the man's soul.*'¹ All this has ceased to be new to our generation, but a hundred and thirty years ago, and indeed much nearer to us than that, the key to all nobleness was thought to be found only by cool balancing and prudential calculation. A book like *Clarissa Harlowe* shows us this prudential and calculating temper underneath a varnish of sentimentalism and fine feelings, an incongruous and extremely displeasing combination, particularly characteristic of certain sets and circles in that many-sided century. One of the distinctions of Vauvenargues is that exaltation of sentiment did not with him cloak a substantial adherence to a low prudence, nor to that fragment of reason which has so constantly usurped the name and place of the whole. He eschewed the too common compromise which the sentimentalist makes with reflection and calculation, and it was this which saved him from being a sentimentalist.

That doctrine of the predominance of the heart over the head, which has brought forth so many pernicious and destructive phantasies in the history of social thought, represented in his case no more than a reaction against the great detractors of humanity. Rochefoucauld had surveyed mankind exclusively from the point of view of their vain and egotistic propensities, and his aphorisms are profoundly true of all persons in whom these propensities are habitually supreme, and of all the world in so far as these propensities happen to influence them. Pascal, on the other hand, leaving the affections and inclinations of man very much on one side, had directed all his efforts to showing the pitiful feebleness and incurable helplessness of

(1) *Œuvres*, ii. 170.

man in the sphere of the understanding. Vauvenargues is thus confronted by two sinister pictures of humanity—the one of its moral meanness and littleness, the other of its intellectual poverty and impotency. He turned away from both of them, and found in magnanimous and unsophisticated feeling, of which he was conscious in himself and observant in others, a compensation alike for the selfishness of some men and the intellectual limitations of all men, which was ample enough to restore the human self-respect that Pascal and Rochefoucauld had done their best to weaken.

The truth in the disparagement was indisputable so far as it went. It was not a kind of truth, however, on which it is good for the world much to dwell, and it is the thinkers like Vauvenargues who build up and inspire high resolve. ‘Scarcely any maxim,’ runs one of his own, ‘is true in all respects.’¹ We must take them in pairs to find out the mean truth; and to understand the ways of men, so far as words about men can help us, we must read with appreciation not only Vauvenargues, who said that great thoughts come from the heart, but La Rochefoucauld, who called the intelligence the dupe of the heart, and Pascal, who saw only desperate creatures, miserably perishing before one another’s eyes in the black dungeon of the universe. Yet it is the observer in the spirit of Vauvenargues, of whom we must always say that he hath chosen the better part. Vauvenargues’ own estimate was sound. ‘The Duke of La Rochefoucauld seized to perfection the weak side of human nature; maybe he knew its strength too; and only contested the merit of so many splendid actions in order to unmask false wisdom. Whatever his design, the effect seems to me mischievous; his book, filled with delicate invective against hypocrisy, even to this day turns men

(1) No. 111.

away from virtue, by persuading them that it is never genuine.'¹ Or, as he put it elsewhere, without express personal reference, 'You must arouse in men the feeling of their prudence and strength, if you would raise their character; those who only apply themselves to bring out the absurdities and weaknesses of mankind, enlighten the judgment of the public far less than they deprave its inclination.'² This principle was implied in Goethe's excellent saying, that if you would improve a man, it is best to begin by persuading him that he is already that which you would have him to be.

To talk in this way was to bring men out from the pits which cynicism on the one side and asceticism on the other had dug so deep for them, back to the warm precincts of the cheerful day. The cynic and the ascetic had each looked at life through a microscope, exaggerating blemishes, distorting proportions, filling the eye with ugly and disgusting illusions.³ Humanity, as was said, was in disgrace with the thinkers. The maxims of Vauvenargues were a plea for a return to a healthy and normal sense of relations. 'These philosophers,' he cried, 'are men, yet they do not speak in human language; they change all the ideas of things, and misuse all their terms.'⁴ These are some of the most direct of his retorts upon Pascal and La Rochefoucauld:—

'I have always felt it to be absurd for philosophers to fabricate a Virtue that is incompatible with the nature of humanity, and then after having pretended this, to declare coldly that there is

(1) *Œuvres*, ii. 74.

(2) No. 285.

(3) 'A man may as well pretend to cure himself of love by viewing his mistress through the artificial medium of a microscope or prospect, and beholding there the coarseness of her skin and monstrous disproportion of her features, as hope to excite or moderate any passion by the artificial arguments of a Seneca or an Epictetus.'—Hume's *Essays* (xviii.), *The Sceptic*.

(4) i. 163.

no virtue. If they are speaking of the phantom of their imagination, they may of course abandon or destroy it as they please, for they invented it; but true virtue, which they cannot be brought to call by this name, because it is not in conformity with their definitions; which is the work of nature and not their own; and which consists mainly in goodness and vigour of soul,—that does not depend on their fancies, and will last for ever with characters that cannot be effaced.’

‘The body has its graces, the intellect its talents; is the heart then to have nothing but vices? And must man, who is capable of reason, be incapable of virtue?’

‘We are susceptible of friendship, justice, humanity, compassion, and reason. O my friends, what then is virtue?’

‘Disgust is no mark of health, nor is appetite a disorder; quite the reverse. Thus we think of the body, but we judge the soul on other principles. We suppose that a strong soul is one that is exempt from passions, and as youth is more active and ardent than later age, we look on it as a time of fever, and place the strength of man in his decay.’¹

The theological speculator insists that virtue lies in a constant and fierce struggle between the will and the passions, between man and human nature. Vauvenargues founded his whole theory of life on the doctrine that the will is not something independent of passions, inclinations, and ideas, but on the contrary is a mere index moved and fixed by them, as the hand of a clock follows the operation of the mechanical forces within. Character is an integral unit. ‘Whether it is reason or passion that moves us, it is we who determine ourselves; it would be madness to distinguish one’s thoughts and sentiments

(1) Nos. 296—7—8, 148.

from one's self. . . . No will in men, which does not owe its direction to their temperament, their reasoning, and their actual feelings.'¹ Virtue, then, is not necessarily a condition of strife between the will and the rest of our faculties and passions; no such strife is possible, for the will obeys the preponderant passion or idea, or group of passions and ideas; and the contest lies between one passion or group and another. Hence, in right character there is no struggle at all, for the virtuous inclinations naturally and easily direct our will and actions; virtue is then independent of struggle; and the circumstance of our finding pleasure in this or that practice, is no reason why both the practice and the pleasure should not be unimpeachably virtuous.

It is easy to see the connection between this theory of the dependence of the will, and the prominence which Vauvenargues is ever giving to the passions. These are the key to the movements of the will. To direct and shape the latter, you must educate the former. It was for his perception of this truth, we may notice in passing, that Comte awarded to Vauvenargues a place in the Positivist Calendar; 'for his direct effort, in spite of the universal desuetude into which it had fallen, to reorganise the culture of the heart according to a better knowledge of human nature, of which this noble thinker discerned the centre to be affective.'²

This theory of the will, however, was not allowed to rest here; the activity of man was connected with the universal order. 'What prevents the mind from perceiving the motive of its actions, is only their infinite quickness. Our thoughts perish at the moment in which their effects make themselves known; when the action commences, the principle has vanished; the will appears, the feeling is gone; we cannot find it our-

(1) *Sur le Libre Arbitre. Œuvres*, i. 199.

(2) *Politique Positive*, iii. 589.

selves, and so doubt if we ever had it. But it would be an enormous defect to have a will without a principle ; our actions would be all haphazard ; the world would be nothing but caprice ; all order would be overturned. It is not enough, then, to admit it to be true that it is reflection or sentiment that leads us : we must add further that it would be monstrous for this to be otherwise.¹

‘The will recalls or suspends our ideas ; our ideas shape or vary the laws of the will ; the laws of the will are thus dependent on the laws of creation ; but the laws of creation are not foreign to ourselves, they constitute our being, and form our essence, and are entirely our own, and we can say boldly that we act by ourselves, when we only act by them.’²

‘Let us recognise here, then, our profound subjection. . . . Let us rend the melancholy veil which hides from our eyes the eternal chain of the world and the glory of the creator. . . . External objects form ideas in the mind, these ideas form sentiments, these sentiments volitions, these volitions actions in ourselves and outside of ourselves. So noble a dependence in all the parts of this vast universe must conduct our reflections to the unity of its principle ; this subordination makes the true greatness of the beings subordinated. The excellence of man is in his dependence ; his subjection displays two marvellous images, the infinite power of God, and the dignity of our own soul. . . . Man independent would be an object of contempt ; the feeling of his own imperfection his eternal torture. But the same feeling, when we admit his dependence, is the foundation of his sweetest hope ; it reveals to him the nothingness of finite good, and leads him back to his principle, which insists on joining itself to him, and which alone can satisfy his desires in the possession of himself.’³

(1) *Ibid.* 194.(2) *Id.* 205.(3) *Id.* 206—7.

Vauvenargues showed his genuine healthiness not more by a plenary rejection of the doctrine of the incurable vileness and frenzy of man, than by his freedom from the boisterous and stupid transcendental optimism which has too many votaries in our time. He would not have men told that they were miserable earth-gnomes, the slaves of a black destiny, but he still placed them a good deal lower than the angels. For instance, 'We are too inattentive or too much occupied with ourselves, to get to the bottom of one another's characters; whoever has watched masks at a ball dance together in a friendly manner and join hands without knowing who the others are, to part the moment afterwards never to meet again nor to regret, can form some idea of the world.'¹ But then, as he said elsewhere, 'We can be perfectly aware of our imperfection, without being humiliated by the sight. One of the noblest qualities of our nature is that we are able so easily to dispense with greater perfection.'² In all this we mark the large and rational humane-ness of the new time, a tolerant and kindly and elevating estimate of men.

The faith in the natural and simple operation of virtue, without the aid of all sorts of valetudinarian restrictions, comes out on every occasion. The Trappist theory of the conditions of virtue found no quarter with him. Mirabeau, for instance, complained of the atmosphere of the court, as fatal to the practice of virtue. Vauvenargues replied that the people there were no doubt no better than they should be, and that vice was dominant. 'So much the worse for those who have vices. But when you are fortunate enough to possess virtue, it is, to my thinking, a very noble ambition to lift up this same virtue in the bosom of corruption, to make it succeed, to place it above all, to indulge and control the passions without

(1) No. 330.

(2) Nos. 462—3.

reproach, to overthrow the obstacles to them, and to surrender yourself to the inclinations of an upright and magnanimous heart, instead of combating or concealing them in retreat without either satisfying or vanquishing them. I know nothing so weak and so vain as to flee before vices, or to hate them without measure, for people only hate them by way of reprisal because they are afraid of them, or else out of vengeance because they have played them some sorry turn; but a little loftiness of soul, some knowledge of the heart, a gentle and tranquil humour, will protect you against the risk of either being surprised, or keenly wounded by them.¹

There is a tolerably obvious distinction between two principal ways of examining character. One is a musing, subjective method of delineation, in which the various shades and windings seem to reveal themselves with a certain spontaneity, and we follow many recesses and depths in the heart of another, such as only music stirs into consciousness in ourselves. Besides this rarer poetic method, there is what may be styled the diplomatist's method, which classifies characters objectively, according to the outer conduct in which they manifest themselves, and the best ways of approaching and dealing with them. The second of these describes the spirit in which Vauvenargues observed men. He is French, and not German, and belongs to the eighteenth century, and not to the seventeenth or the nineteenth. His *Characters*, very little known in this country, are as excellent as any work in this kind that we are acquainted with, or probably as excellent as such work can be. They are real and natural, yet while abstaining as rigorously as Vauvenargues everywhere does from grotesque and extravagant traits, avoid equally the vice of presenting the mere bald and sterile flats of character, which he that runs may read. As we have said,

(1) *Correspondance. Œuvres*, ii. 163.

he had the quality possessed by so few of those who write about men; he watched men, and drew from the life. In a word, he studied concrete examples, and interrogated his own experience,—the only sure guarantee that one writing on his themes has anything which it is worth our while to listen to. Among other consequences of this reality of their source is the agreeable fact that these pictures are free from that clever bitterness and easy sarcasm, by which crude and jejune observers, thinking more of their own wit than of what they observe, sometimes gain a little reputation. Even the coxcombs, self-duping knaves, simpletons, braggarts, and other evil or pitiful types whom he selects, are drawn with unstrained and simple conformity to reality. The pictures have no moral label pinned on at the bottom. Yet Vauvenargues took life seriously enough, and it was just because he took it seriously, that he had no inclination to air his wit or practise a verbal humour upon the stuff out of which happiness and misery are made.

One or two fragments will suffice in this order. Take the Man of the World, for instance:—

‘A man of the world is not he who knows other men best, who has most foresight or dexterity in affairs, who is most instructed by experience and study; he is neither a good manager, nor a man of science, nor a politician, nor a skilful officer, nor a painstaking magistrate; he is a man who is ignorant of nothing, but who knows nothing; who, doing his own business ill, fancies himself very capable of doing that of other people; a man who has much useless wit, who has the art of saying flattering things which do not flatter, and judicious things which give no information, who can persuade nobody though he speaks well; endowed with that sort of eloquence which can bring out trifles, and which annihilates great subjects;

as penetrating in what is ridiculous and external in men, as he is blind to the depths of their minds. One who, afraid of being wearisome by reason, is wearisome by his extravagances ; is jocose without gaiety, and lively without passion.’¹

Or the two following, the Inconstant Man, and Lycas or the Firm Man :—

‘Such a man seems really to possess more than one character. A powerful imagination makes his soul take the shape of all the objects that affect it ; he suddenly astonishes the world by acts of generosity and courage which were never expected of him ; the image of virtue inflames, elevates, softens, masters his heart ; he receives the impression from the loftiest, and he surpasses them. But when his imagination has grown cold, his courage droops, his generosity sinks ; the vices opposed to these virtues take possession of his soul, and after having reigned awhile supreme, they make way for other objects. . . . We cannot say that they have a nature great, or strong, or weak, or light ; it is a swift and imperious imagination which reigns with sovereign power over all their being, which subjugates their genius, and which prescribes for them in turn, those fine actions and those faults, those heights and those littlenesses, those flights of enthusiasm and those fits of disgust, which we are wrong in charging either with hypocrisy or madness.’²

‘Lycas unites with a self-reliant, bold, and impetuous nature, a spirit of reflection and profundity which moderates the counsels of his passions, which leads him by impenetrable motives, and makes him advance to his ends by many paths. He is one of those long-sighted men, who consider the suc-

(1) *Œuvres*, i. 310.

(2) i. 325.

cession of events from afar off, who always finish a design begun; who are capable, I do not say of dissembling either a misfortune or an offence, but of rising above either, instead of letting it depress them; deep natures, independent by their firmness in daring all and suffering all, who, whether they resist their inclinations out of foresight, or whether, out of pride and a secret consciousness of their resources, they defy what is called prudence, always cheat in good as in evil the acutest conjectures.¹

Let us note that Vauvenargues is almost entirely free from that favourite trick of the aphoristic person, which consists in forming a series of sentences, the predicates being various qualifications of extravagance, vanity, and folly, and the subject being Woman. He resists this besetting temptation of the modern speaker of apophthegms to identify woman and fool. On the one or two occasions in which he begins the maxim with the fatal words, *Les femmes*, he is as little profound as other people who persist in thinking of men and women as two different species. 'Women,' for example, 'have ordinarily more vanity than temperament, and more temperament than virtue,'—which is fairly true of all human beings, and in so far as it is true, describes men just as exactly, and no more, as it describes women. In truth, Vauvenargues felt too seriously about conduct and character to go far in this direction. Now and again he is content with a mere smartness, as when he says, 'Il y a de fort bonnes gens qui ne peuvent se désennuyer qu'aux dépens de la société.' But such a mood is not common. He is usually grave, and not seldom profoundly weighty, delicate without being weak, and subtle without obscurity; as for example :—

(1) i. 326.

“People teach children to fear and obey ; the avarice, pride, or timidity of the fathers, instructs the children in economy, arrogance, or submission. We stir them up to be yet more and more copyists, which they are only too disposed to be, as it is ; nobody thinks of making them original, hardy, independent.’

‘If instead of dulling the vivacity of children, people did their best to raise the impulsiveness and movement of their characters, what might we not expect from a fine natural temper ?’

Again, ‘The moderation of the weak is mediocrity.’

‘What is arrogance in the weak is elevation in the strong ; as the strength of a sick man is frenzy, and that of the whole is vigour.’

‘To speak imprudently and to speak boldly is nearly always the same thing ; but we may speak without prudence, and still speak what is right ; and it is a mistake to fancy that a man has a shallow intelligence, because the boldness of his character or the liveliness of his temper may have drawn from him, in spite of himself, some dangerous truth.’

‘It is a great sign of mediocrity always to praise moderately.’

He has a saying to the effect that men very often, without thinking of it, form an idea of their face and expression from the ruling sentiment of which they are conscious in themselves at the time, and hints that this is perhaps the reason why a coxcomb always believes himself to be handsome.¹ And in a letter to Mirabeau, he describes pleasantly how sometimes, in moments of distraction, he pictures himself with an air of loftiness, of majesty, of penetration, according to the idea that is occupying his mind, and how if by chance he sees his face in

(1) No. 236.

the mirror, he is nearly as much amazed as if he saw a Cyclops or a Tartar.¹ Yet his nature, if we may trust the portrait, revealed itself in his face, which is one of the most delightful to look upon, even in the cold inarticulateness of an engraving, that the gallery of fair souls contains for us. We may read the beauty of his character in the soft strength of the brow, the meditative lines of mouth and chin, above all the striking clearness, the self-collection, the feminine solicitude, that mingle freely and without eagerness or expectancy in his gaze, as though he were hearkening to some ever-flowing inward stream of divine melody. If we reproach France in the eighteenth century with its coarseness, artificiality, shallowness, because it produced such men as the rather brutish Duclos, we ought to remember that this was also the century of Vauvenargues, one of the most tender, lofty, cheerful, and delicately sober of all moralists.

(1) ii. 188.

CONDORCET.

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CONDORCET.

OF the illustrious thinkers and writers who for two generations had been actively scattering the seed of revolution in France, only Condorcet survived to behold the first bitter ingathering of the harvest. Those who had sown the wind were no more; he only was left to see the reaping of the whirlwind, and to be swiftly and cruelly swept away by it. Voltaire and Diderot, Rousseau and Helvétius, had vanished, but Condorcet both assisted at the *Encyclopædia* and sat in the Convention; the one eminent man of those who had tended the tree, who also came in due season to partake of its fruit; at once a precursor, and a sharer in the fulfilment. In neither character has he attracted the good-will of any of those considerable sections and schools into which criticism of the Revolution has been mainly divided. As a thinker he is roughly classed as an Economist, and as a practical politician he figured first in the Legislative Assembly, and next in the Convention. Now, as a rule, the political parties that have most admired the Convention have had least sympathy with the Economists, and the historians who are most favourable to Turgot and his followers, are usually most hostile to the actions and associations of the great revolutionary chamber successively swayed by a Vergniaud, a Danton, a Robespierre. Between the two, Condorcet's name has been allowed to lie hidden for the most part in a certain obscurity, or else has been covered with those taunts and innuendoes, which partisans are wont to lavish on men of whom they do not know exactly whether they are with or against them.

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Generally, the men of the Revolution are criticised in blocks and sections, and Condorcet cannot be accurately placed under any of these received schools. He was an Economist, but he was something more ; for the most characteristic article in his creed was a passionate belief in the infinite perfectibility of human nature. He was more of a Girondin than a Jacobin, yet he did not always act, any more than he always thought, with the Girondins, and he did not fall when they fell, but was proscribed by a decree specially levelled at himself. Isolation of this kind is assuredly no merit in political action, but it explains the coldness with which Condorcet's memory has been treated ; and it flowed from some marked singularities both of character and opinion, which are of the highest interest, if we consider the position of the man, and the lustre of that ever-memorable time. Condorcet, said D'Alembert, is a volcano covered with snow. Said another, less picturesquely, He is a sheep in a passion. 'You may say of the intelligence of Condorcet in relation to his person,' wrote Madame Roland, 'that it is a subtle essence soaked in cotton.' The curious mixture disclosed by sayings like these, of warm impulse and fine purpose with immovable reserve, only shows that he of whom they were spoken belonged to the class of natures which may be called non-conducting. They are not effective, because without this effluence of power and feeling from within, the hearer or onlooker is stirred by no sympathetic thrill. They cannot be the happiest, because consciousness of the inequality between expression and meaning, between the influence intended and the impression conveyed, must be as tormenting as to one who dreams is the vain effort to strike a blow. If to be of this non-conducting temperament is impossible in the really greatest sorts of men, like St. Paul, St. Bernard, or Luther, at least it is no proper object of blame, for it is constantly the companion

of lofty and generous aspiration. It was perhaps unfortunate that Condorcet should have permitted himself to be drawn into a position where his want of that magical quality by which even the loathed and loathsome Marat could gain the sympathies of men, should be so conspicuously made visible. Frankly, the character of Condorcet, unlike so many of his contemporaries, offers nothing to the theatrical instinct. None the less on this account should we weigh the contributions which he made to the stock of science and social speculation, and recognise the fine elevation of his sentiments, his noble solicitude for human well-being, his eager and resolute belief in its indefinite expansion, and the devotion which sealed his faith by a destiny that was as tragical as any in those bloody and most tragical days.

I.

Until the outbreak of the Revolution, the circumstances of Condorcet's life were as little externally disturbed or specially remarkable as those of any other geometer and thinker of the time. He was born at a small town in Picardy, in the year 1743. His father was a cavalry officer, but as he died when his son was only three years old, he could have exerted no influence upon the future philosopher, save such as comes of transmission through blood and tissue. Condillac was his uncle, but there is no record of any intercourse between them. His mother was a devout and trembling soul, who dedicated her child to the Holy Virgin, and for eight years or more made him wear the dress of a little girl, by way of sheltering him against the temptations and unbelief of a vile world. So long as women are held by opinion and usage in a state of educational and political subjection, which prevents the growth of a large intelligence, made healthy and energetic by knowledge

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At any rate, Condorcet's curiosity was very speedily drawn to problems beyond those which geometry and algebra pretend to solve. 'For thirty years,' he wrote in 1790, 'I have hardly ever passed a single day without meditating on the political sciences.'¹ Thus, when only seventeen, when the ardour of even the choicest spirits is usually most purely intellectual, moral and social feeling was rising in Condorcet to that supremacy which it afterwards attained in him to so admirable a degree. He wrote essays on integral calculus, but he was already beginning to reflect upon the laws of human societies and the conditions of moral obligation. At the root of Condorcet's nature was a profound sensibility of constitution. One of his biographers explains his early enthusiasm for virtue and human welfare as the conclusion of a kind of syllogism. It is possible that the syllogism was only the later shape into which an instinctive impulse threw itself by way of rational entrenchment. This sensibility caused Condorcet to abandon the barbarous pleasures of the chase, which had at first powerfully attracted him.² To derive delight from what inflicts pain on any sentient creature revolted his conscience and offended his reason, because he perceived that the character which does not shrink from associating its own joy with the anguish of another, is either found or left mortally blunted to the finest impressions of humanity. It was this same sensibility, fortified by reason, which drove him while almost still at school to reflect, as he confided to Turgot he had done, on the moral ideas of virtue and justice.³

It is thus assured that from the beginning Condorcet was unable to satisfy himself with the mere knowledge of the

(1) *Œuvres de Condorcet*. (12 vols. 1847—9.) ix. 489.

(2) *Œuvres*, i. 220.

(3) *Ibid.*

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his two volumes of *Eloges* abundantly show—one cannot help being struck by the eagerness with which he seizes on any trait of zeal for social improvement, of anxiety that the lives and characters of our fellows should be better worth having. He was himself too absolutely possessed by this social spirit to have flinched from his career, even if he had foreseen the martyrdom which was to consummate it. ‘You are very happy,’ he once wrote to Turgot, ‘in your passion for the public good and your power to satisfy it; it is a great consolation, and of an order very superior to that of study.’¹

In 1769, at the age of six-and-twenty, Condorcet became connected with the Academy, to the mortification of his relations, who hardly pardoned him for not being a captain of cavalry, as his father had been before him. About the same time or a little later, he performed a pilgrimage of a kind that could hardly help making a mark upon a character so deeply impressible. In company with D’Alembert, he went to Ferney and saw Voltaire. To the position of Voltaire in Europe in 1770 there has never been any other man’s position in any age wholly comparable. It is true that there had been one or two of the great popes, and a great ecclesiastic like St. Bernard, who had exercised a spiritual authority, pretty universally submitted to, or even spontaneously invoked, throughout western Europe. But these were the representatives of a powerful organisation and an accepted system. Voltaire filled a place before men’s eyes in the eighteenth century as conspicuous and as authoritative as that of St. Bernard in the twelfth. The difference was that Voltaire’s place was absolutely unofficial in its origin, and indebted to no system nor organisation for its maintenance. Again, there have been others, like Bacon or Descartes, destined to make a far more permanent contribution to the ideas which have extended the powers and elevated the

(1) *Œuvres*, i. 201. See Turgot’s wise reply, p. 202.

happiness of men ; but these great spirits for the most part laboured for the generation that followed them, and won comparatively slight recognition from their own age. Voltaire, during his life, enjoyed to the full not only the admiration that belongs to the poet, but something of the veneration that is paid to the thinker, and even something of the glory usually reserved for captains and conquerors of renown. No other man before or since ever hit so exactly the mark of his time on every side, so precisely met the conditions of fame for the moment, nor so thoroughly dazzled and reigned over the foremost men and women who were his contemporaries. Wherever else intellectual fame has approached the fame of Voltaire, it has been posthumous. With him it was immediate and splendid. Into the secret of this extraordinary circumstance we need not here particularly inquire. He was an unsurpassed master of the art of literary expression in a country where that art is more highly prized than anywhere else ; he was the most brilliant of wits among a people whose relish for wit is a supreme passion ; he won the admiration of the lighter souls by his plays, of the learned by his interest in science, of the men of letters by his never-ceasing flow of essays, criticisms, and articles, not one of which lacks vigour and freshness and sparkle ; he was the most active, bitter, and telling foe of what was then the most justly abhorred of all institutions—the Church. Add to these remarkable titles to honour and popularity that he was no mere declaimer against oppression and injustice in the abstract, but the strenuous, persevering, and absolutely indefatigable champion of every victim of oppression or injustice whose case was once brought under his eye.¹

(1) On the state of opinion in France about the Newtonian principles before Voltaire, see Condorcet's Letter to La Harpe, i. 289. Also his *Life of Voltaire*, *Œuvres*, iv. 40.

It is not difficult to perceive the fascination which Voltaire, with this character and this unrivalled splendour of public position, would have for a man like Condorcet. He conceived the warmest attachment to Voltaire, and Voltaire in turn the highest respect for him. Their correspondence (1770—1778) is perhaps as interesting as any letters of that period that we possess : Voltaire always bright, playful, and affectionate ; Condorcet more declamatory and less graceful, but full of reverence and loyalty for his 'dear and illustrious' master, and of his own peculiar eagerness for good causes and animosity against the defenders of evil ones. Condorcet was younger than the Patriarch of Ferney by nearly half a century, but this did not prevent him from loyal remonstrances on more than one occasion against conduct on Voltaire's part in this matter or that, which he held to be unworthy of his character and reputation. He went so far as actually to decline to print in the *Mercur* a letter in which the writer in some fit of spleen placed Montesquieu below D'Aguesseau. 'My attachment,' he says, 'bids me say what will be best for you, and not what might please you most. If I loved you less, I should not have the courage to thwart you. I am aware of your grievances against Montesquieu ; it is worthy of you to forget them.' There was perhaps as much moral courage in doing this as in defying the Men of the Mountain in the days of the Terror. It dispels some false impressions of Voltaire's supposed intolerance of criticism, to find him thanking Condorcet for one of these friendly protests. He showed himself worthy of such courageous conduct. 'One sees things ill,' he writes, 'when one sees them from too far off. After all, we ought never to blush to go to school if we are as old as Methuselah. I repeat my acknowledgments to you.'¹ Condorcet did not conceive that either to be blind to a man's

(1) *Œuvres*, i. xli.

errors or to compromise them was to prove yourself his friend. There is an integrity of friendship as in public concerns, and he adhered to it as manfully in one as in the other. Throughout his intercourse with intimate friends there is that happy and frank play of direct personal allusion, which is as distinct from flattery when it is about another, as it is from egotism when it refers to the writer himself.

Perhaps we see him most characteristically in his correspondence with Turgot. Turgot was as much less vivacious than Condorcet, as Condorcet was less vivacious than Voltaire. They belonged to quite distinct types of character, but this may be a condition of the most perfect forms of sympathy. Each gives support where the other is most conscious of needing it. Turgot was one of those serene, capacious, and sure intelligences whose aspirations do not become low nor narrow by being watchfully held under the control of reason; whose ideas are no less vigorous or exuberant because they move in a steady and ordered train; and who, in their most fervent reactions against abuses or crimes, resist that vehement temptation to excess which is the besetting infirmity of generous natures. Condorcet was very different from this. Whatever he wished, he wished unrestrainedly. As with most men of the epoch, the habit of making allowances was not his. We observe, let it be confessed, something theological in his hatred of theologians. Even in his letters the distant ground-swell of repressed passion sounds in the ear, and at every mention of false opinion or evil-doing a sombre and angry shadow seems to fall upon the page. Both he and Turgot clung to the doctrine of the infinite perfectibility of human nature, and the correspondingly infinite augmentation of human happiness; but Condorcet's ever-smouldering impetuosity would be content with nothing less than the arrival of at least a considerable instalment of this infinite quantity now

and instantly. He went so far as to insist that by-and-by men would acquire the art of prolonging their lives for several generations, instead of being confined within the fatal span of threescore years and ten. He was impatient of any frittering away of life in scruples, tremors, and hesitations. 'For the most part,' he once wrote to Turgot, 'people abounding in scruple are not fit for great things : a Christian will throw away in subduing the darts of the flesh the time which he might have employed on things of use to mankind ; or he will lack courage to rise against a tyrant for fear of his judgment being too hastily formed, &c.'¹ Turgot's reply may illustrate the difference between the two men :—'No virtue, in whatever sense you take the word, dispenses with justice ; and I think no more of the people who do great things—as you say—at the expense of justice, than of poets who fancy they produce great beauties of imagination without regularity (*justesse*). I know that excessive exactitude tends slightly to deaden the fire alike of composition and of action ; but there is a mean in everything. It has never been a question in our controversy of a Capucin who throws away his time in quenching the darts of the flesh (though, by the way, in the total of time thrown away the term that expresses the time lost in satisfying these lusts is most likely far greater) ; no more is it a question of a fool who is afraid of rising against tyrants for fear of forming a rash judgment.'²

This ability to conceive a mean case between two extremes was not among Condorcet's gifts. His mind dwelt too much in the region of immoderation, alike when he measured the possibilities of the good, and coloured the motives and the situation of those whom he counted the bad. A Christian was one who wasted his days in merely resisting the flesh ; and

(1) *Œuvres*, i. 228.

(2) i. 232.

anybody who declined to rise against a tyrant was the victim of a slavish scrupulosity. He rather sympathises with a scientific traveller, to whom the especial charm of natural history resides in the buffets which, at each step that it takes, it inflicts on Moses.¹ Well, this temper is not the richest nor the highest, but it often exists in alliance with rich and high qualities. It was so with Condorcet. And we are particularly bound to remember that with him a harsh and impatient humour was not, as is so often the case, the veil for an indolent reluctance to form painstaking judgments. Few workers have been so conscientious as he was, in the labour he bestowed upon subjects which he held to be worthy of deliberate scrutiny and consideration. His defect was in finding too few of such subjects, in having too many foregone conclusions. Turgot and Montesquieu are perhaps the only two eminent men in France during this part of the century, of whom the same defect might not be alleged. Again, Condorcet's impatience of underlying temperament did not prevent him from filling his compositions with solid, sober, and profound reflections, the products of grave and sustained meditation upon an experience, much of which must have been severely trying and repugnant to one of his constitution. While recognising this trait, then, let us not over-state either it or its consequences.

It is now becoming easier through the distance to discern what were the main currents of opinion and circumstance in France, when Condorcet came to take his place among her workers. The third quarter of the century was just closing. Louis xv. died in 1774; and though his death was of little intrinsic consequence, except as the removal of every foul and corrupt heart is of consequence, it is justly taken to mark the date of the beginning of the French Revolution. It was the

(1) i. 299.

accidental shifting of position which served to disclose that the existing system was smitten with a mortal paralysis. It is often said that what destroyed the French kingdom was despotism. A sounder explanation discovers the causes less in despotism than in anarchy—anarchy in every department where it could be most ruinous. We look in vain for a single firm or sound spot in the whole field of government. There appeared to be no sure centre of renovating processes. Whatever was done in the direction of reform seemed, like the new patch in the old garment, only to make wider the rents and divisions that distracted the country. No substantial reconstruction was possible, because all the evils came from the sinister interests of the nobles, the clergy, or the financiers; and these classes, informally bound together against the common weal, were too strong for either the sovereign or the ablest minister to thrust them aside. The material condition of France was one of supreme embarrassment and disorder, only curable by remedies which the political and social condition of the country made it impossible to employ.

This would explain why a change of some sort was inevitable. But why was the change which actually took place in that direction rather than another? Why did not France sink under her economical disorders, as greater empires than France had done? Why, instead of sinking and falling asunder, did the French people advance with a singleness of impulse unknown before in their history to their own deliverance; overthrow the system that was crushing them, and purge themselves with fire and sword of those who administered and maintained it, defying the hopes of the nation; and then successfully encounter the giant's task of beating back reactionary Europe with one arm, and reconstructing the fabric of their own society with the other? The answer to this question is found

in the moral and spiritual condition of France. A generation aroused by the great social ideas of the eighteenth century, looking round to survey its own social state, found itself in the midst of the ruin and disorder of the disintegrated system of the twelfth century. The life was gone out of the ancient organisation of Catholicism and Feudalism, and apparently nothing but corruption remained. What enabled the leaders of the nation to discern the horror and despair of this anarchic dissolution of the worn-out old, and what inspired them with hope and energy when they thought of the possible new, was the spiritual preparation that had been in swift progress since the third decade of the century. The forms and methods of this preparation were various, as the temperaments that came beneath its influence. But the school of Voltaire, the school of Rousseau, and the schools of Quesnay and Montesquieu, different as they were at the roots, all alike energetically familiarised the public mind with a firm belief in human reason, and the idea of the natural rights of man, and impregnated it with a growing enthusiasm for social justice. It is true that we find Voltaire complaining towards the close of his days, of the century being satiated and weary, *un siècle dégoûté*, not knowing well what it wanted. 'The public,' he said, 'has been eighty years at table, and now it drinks bad brandy at the end of its meal.'¹ In literature and art this was true; going deeper down than these, the public was eager and sensitive with a freshness far more vital and more fruitful than it had known eighty years back. Sitting down with a keen appetite for taste, erudition, and literary knowledge, men had now risen up from a dazzling and palling board, with a new hunger and thirst after social righteousness. This was the noble faith which saved France, by this sign she was victorious. A people once saturated with

(1) Letters to Condorcet (1774). *Œuvres*, i. 35.

a passionately held conception of justice is not likely to fall into a Byzantine stage. Such a destiny only awaits nations where the spiritual power is rigorously confined in the hands of castes and official churches, which systematically and of their very constitution bury justice under the sterile accumulations of a fixed superstition.

Condorcet's principles were deeply coloured by ideas drawn from two sources. He was a Voltairean in the intensity of his antipathies to the church, and in the depth and energy of his humanity. But while Voltaire flourished and taught, the destructive movement only reached theology, and Voltaire, though he had more to do than anybody else with the original impulse, joined in no attack upon the state. It was from the economical writers and from Montesquieu that Condorcet learned to look upon societies with a scientific eye, to perceive the influence of institutions upon men, and that there are laws, susceptible of modification in practice, which regulate their growth. It was natural, therefore, that he should join with eagerness in the reforming movement which set in with such irrestrainable velocity after the death of Louis xv. He was bitter and destructive with the bitterness of Voltaire; he was hopeful for the future with the faith of Turgot; and he was urgent, heated, impetuous, with a ponderous vehemence all his own. In a word, he was the incarnation of the revolutionary spirit, as the revolutionary spirit existed in geometers and Encyclopædists; at once too reasonable and too little reasonable, too precise and scientific and too vague, too rigorously logical on the one hand, and too abundantly passionate on the other. Perhaps there is no more fatal combination in politics than the deductive method worked by passion; such machinery with such motive force is of ruinous potency when applied to the delicate and complex affairs of society.

Condorcet's peculiarities of political antipathy and preference can hardly be better illustrated than by his view of the two great revolutions in English history. The first was religious, and therefore he hated it; the second was accompanied by much argument, and had no religion about it, and therefore he extolled it. It is scientific knowledge, he said, which explains why the efforts after liberty in the unenlightened centuries are so fleeting, and so deeply stained by bloodshed and massacre: — 'Compare these with the happy efforts of America and France; observe even in the same century, but at different epochs, the two revolutions of England fanatical and England enlightened; we see on the one side contemporaries of Prynne and Knox, while crying out that they are fighting for heaven and liberty, cover their unhappy country with blood in order to cement the tyranny of the hypocrite Cromwell; on the other, the contemporaries of Boyle and Newton establish with pacific wisdom the freest constitution in the world.'¹ It is not wonderful that his own revolution was misunderstood by one who thus loved English Whigs, but hated English Republicans; who could forgive an aristocratic faction grasping power for their order, but not a nation rising and smiting its oppressor, where they smote in the name of the Lord and of Gideon, nor with a ruler who used his power with a noble simplicity in the interests of his people, and established in the heart of the nation a respect for itself such as she has never known since, because this ruler knew nothing about *principes* or the Rights of Man. However, Nemesis comes; for by-and-by Condorcet found himself writing a piece to show that our Revolution of 1688 was very inferior in lawfulness to the French Revolution of the Tenth of August.²

(1) *Eloge de Franklin*, iii. 422.

(2) *Réflexions sur la Rév. de 1688, et sur celle du 10 Août*, xii. 197.

II.

The course of events after 1774 is in its larger features well known to every reader. Turgot, after a month of office at the Admiralty, was in August made Controller-General of Finance. With his accession to power, the reforming ideas of the century became practical. He nominated Condorcet to be Inspector of Coinage, an offer which Condorcet deprecated in these words, 'It is said of you in certain quarters that money costs you nothing when there is any question of obliging your friends. I should be bitterly ashamed of giving any semblance of foundation to these absurd speeches. I pray you, do nothing for me just now. Though not rich, I am not pressed for money. Entrust to me some important task—the reduction of measures for instance; then wait till my labours have really earned some reward.'¹ In this patriotic spirit he undertook, along with two other eminent men of science, the task of examining certain projects for canals which engaged the attention of the minister. 'People will tell you,' he wrote, 'that I have got an office worth two hundred and forty pounds. All lies. We undertook it out of friendship for M. Turgot; but we refused the salaries which were offered.'² We may profitably contrast this devotion to the public interest with the rapacity of the clergy and nobles, who drove Turgot from office because he talked of taxing them like their neighbours, and declined to glut their insatiable craving for place and plunder.

Turgot was dismissed (May, 1776), and presently Necker was installed in his place. Condorcet had defended with much vigour and a little asperity the policy of free internal trade in corn against Necker, who was for the maintenance of the restrictions of commercial intercourse between the different

(1) *Œuvres*, i. lxxi.

(2) i. lxxiii—iv.

Consequently, when the new
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(2) i. lviii.

and Bailly 15. 'Jamais aucune
Buffon, and detested *philosophes*,
philos. du 18ième Siècle, i. 77.

pitiful a doom in store for the two candidates of that day, soon closed D'Alembert's share in these struggles of the learned and in all others. He died in the following year, and by his last act testified to his trust in the generous character of Condorcet; for having by the benevolence of a lifetime left himself on his death-bed without resources, he confided to his friend's care two old and faithful servants, for whom he was unable to make provision. This charge the philosopher accepted cheerfully, and fulfilled to the end with pious scrupulosity. The affection between them had been warm and close as that of some famous pairs of antiquity; a natural attraction of character had clothed community of pursuit and interest with the grace of the highest kind of friendship. Even Condorcet's too declamatory manner only adds a certain dignity to the pathetic passage with which he closes his noble *éloge* on his lost friend.¹ Voltaire was dead these five years, and Turgot, too, was gone. Society offered the survivor no recompense. He found the great world tiresome and frivolous, and he described its pursuits in phrases that are still faithful to the fact, as 'dissipation without pleasure, vanity without meaning, and idleness without repose.' It was perhaps to soften the oppression of these cruel and tender regrets that in 1786 Condorcet married.²

Events were now very close at hand, in comparison with which even the most critical private transactions of Condorcet's life were pale and insignificant. In the tranquil seasons of history, when the steady currents of circumstance bear men along noiseless, the importance of the relations which we contract

(1) *Œuvres*, iii. 109, 110.

(2) His wife, said to be one of the most beautiful women of her time, was twenty-three years younger than himself, and survived until 1822. Cabanis married another sister, and Marshal Grouchy was her brother. Madame Condorcet wrote nothing of her own, except some notes to a translation which she made of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

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after a long night of blackness and misery, Condorcet thought he could best serve the movement by calling the minds of the electors to certain sides of their duty which they might be in some danger of overlooking. One of the subjects, for example, on which he felt most strongly, but on which his countrymen have not shown any particular sensibility, was slavery and the slave trade.¹ He appealed to the electors with a terseness and force not always characteristic of his writings, while they were reclaiming their own rights in the name of justice, not to forget the half million blacks, whose rights had been still more shamefully torn away from them, and whose need of justice was yet more urgent than their own. In the same spirit he published a vehement and ingenious protest against the admission of representatives from the St. Domingo plantations to the National Assembly, showing how grossly inconsistent it was with every idea of a free and popular chamber that men should sit as representatives of others who had never chosen them, and that they should invoke natural rights in their own favour, when at the same instant they were violating the most elementary and undisputed natural rights of mankind at home.²

Of general precepts he never tired ; one series of them followed another. To us some of the number may seem commonplace ; but we should reflect that the election of representatives was an amazing novelty in France, and Condorcet knew men well enough to be aware of the hazards of political inexperience.

(1) Montesquieu, and one or two other writers, had attacked slavery long before, and Condorcet published a very effective piece against it in 1781 (*Réflexions sur l'Esclavage des Nègres* ; *Œuvres*, vii. 63), with an epistle dedicated to the enslaved blacks. About the same time an Abolition Society was formed in France, following the example set in England.

(2) *Au Corps Electoral, contre l'Esclavage des Noirs*. 3 Fév., 1789. *Sur l'Admission des Députés des Planteurs de Saint Domingue*. 1789. ix. 469—485.

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which he conceived that the legislative body should forthwith apply itself; and among them, be it said, is no mention of any of those projects of confiscation which circumstances so speedily forced upon the Assembly when it met.¹

Though many of these precepts, designed to guide the electors in their choice of men, are sagacious and admirable, they smack strongly of that absolute and abstract spirit which can never become powerful in politics without danger. It is certain that in the spring of '89, Condorcet held hereditary monarchy to be most suitable to 'the wealth, the population, the extent of France, and to the political system of Europe.'² Yet the reasons which he gives for thinking this are not very cogent, and he can hardly have felt them to be so; moreover, he would hardly have made any remark on the subject if he had not been conscious of the hazard there was. It is significant, however, of the little distance which all the most uncompromising and most thoughtful revolutionists saw in front of them, that even Condorcet should, so late as the eve of the assembly of the States-General, have talked about attachment to the forms of monarchy and respect for the royal person and prerogative; and should have represented the notion of the property of the Church undergoing any confiscation as an invention of the enemies of freedom.³ Before the year was out, the property of the Church had undergone confiscation; before two years had gone he was an ardent Republican; and in some twelve months more he had voted the king guilty.

It is worth while to cite here a still more pointed example of the want of prevision, so common and so intelligible at that time. Writing in July, 1791, he confutes those who asserted

(1) *Réflexions sur les Pouvoirs et Instructions à donner par les Provinces à leurs Députés aux États-Généraux*, ix. 263—283.

(2) ix. 266.

(3) ix. 264.

that an established and limited monarchy was a safeguard against a usurper, whose power is only limited by his own audacity and address, by pointing out that the extent of France, its divisions into departments, the separation between the various branches of the administration, the freedom of the press, the multitude of the public prints, were all so many insurmountable barriers against a French Cromwell. 'To anybody who has read with attention the history of the usurpation of Cromwell, it is clear that a single newspaper would have been enough to stop his success; it is clear that if the people of England had known how to read other books beside their Bible, the hypocritical Pretender, unmasked from his first step, would soon have ceased to be dangerous.' Again, is the nation to be cajoled by some ambitious general, gratifying its desire to be an empire-race? 'Is this what is asked by true friends of liberty, those who only seek that reason and right should have empire over men? *What provinces, conquered by a French general, will he despoil to buy our suffrages? Will he promise our soldiers, as the consuls promised the citizens of Rome, the pillage of Spain or of Syria?* No, assuredly; it is because we cannot be an empire-nation (*peuple-roi*), that we shall remain a free nation.'¹ How many years were there between this conclusive reasoning, and the pillage of Italy to please the Parisians, the campaign in Syria, the seizure of Spain?

Condorcet was not a member of the Assembly in whose formation and composition he had taken so vivid and practical an interest. The first political functions which he was invited to undertake, were those of a member of the municipality of Paris. In the tremendous drama of which the scenes were now opening, the Town-hall of Paris was to prove itself far more truly the centre of movement and action than the Constituent

(1) xii. 228—9, and 234.

Assembly. The efforts of the Constituent Assembly to build up were tardy and ineffectual. The activity of the municipality of Paris in pulling down was after a time ceaseless, and it was eminently successful. The first mayor was the astronomer Bailly, Condorcet's defeated competitor at the Academy. With fall of Bastille, summary hangings at the nearest lantern-post, October insurrection of women, and triumphant compulsion of king, queen, and Assembly to Paris from Versailles, with heads accompanying on pikes, the two rivals, now colleagues, must have felt that the contests for them were indeed no longer academic. The astronomy of the one and the geometry of the other were for ever done with; and Condorcet's longing for active political life in preference to mere study was to be liberally gratified.

Unhappily or not, the movement was beyond the control of anybody who, like Condorcet, had no force but that of disciplined reason and principle. The Bastille no sooner fell, than the Revolution set in with oceanic violence, in the face of which patriotic intention and irrefragable arguments, even when both intention and arguments were loyally revolutionary, were powerless to save the state. In crises of this overwhelming kind, power of reasoning does not tell, and mere good-will does not tell. Exaltation reaches a pitch at which the physical sensibilities are so quickened as to be supreme over the rest of the nature; and in these moods it is the man gifted with the physical quality, as mysterious and indescribable as it is resistless, of a Marat, to take a bad example, or a Danton, to take a good one, who can 'ride the whirlwind and direct the storm.' Of this quality Condorcet had nothing. His personal presence inspired a decent respect, but no strong emotion either of fear or admiration or physical sympathy. His voice was feeble, his utterance indistinct; and he never got over that nervous appre-

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of it. He never wrung his hands, nor wept, nor bewailed the unreason of the multitudes to whom he in vain preached reason. Unlike the typical man of letters, for he was without vanity, he did not abandon the cause of the Revolution because his suggestions were often repulsed. 'It would be better,' he said to the Girondins, 'if you cared less for personal matters and attended only to public interests.' Years ago, in his *éloge* on L'Hôpital, he had praised the famous Chancellor for incurring the hostility of both of the two envenomed factions, the League and the Huguenots, and for disregarding the approbation or disapprobation of the people. 'What operation,' he asked, 'capable of producing any durable good, can be understood by the people? How should they know to what extent good is possible? How judge of the means of producing it? It must ever be easier for a charlatan to mislead the people, than for a man of genius to save it.'¹ Remembering this law, he never lost patience. He was cool and intrepid, if his intrepidity was of the logical sort rather than physical; and he was steadfast to one or two simple aims, if he was on some occasions too rapid in changing his attitude as to special measures. He was never afraid of the spectre, as the incompetent revolutionist is. On the contrary, he understood its whole internal history; he knew what had raised it, what passion and what weakness gave it substance, and he knew that by-and-by reason would banish it and restore men to a right mind. The scientific spirit implanted in such a character as Condorcet's, and made robust by social meditation, builds up an impregnable fortitude

(1) *Œuvres*, iii. 533. As this was written in 1777, Condorcet was perhaps thinking of Turgot and Necker. Of the latter, his daughter tells us repeatedly, without any consciousness that she is recording a most ignominious trait, that public approbation was the very breath of his nostrils, the thing for which he lived, the thing without which he was wretched.—See vol. i. of *De Staël's Considerations*.

in the face of incessant rebuffs and discouragements. Let us then picture Condorcet as surveying the terrific welter from the summer of '89 to the summer of '93, from the taking of the Bastille to the fall of the Girondins, with something of the firmness and self-possession of a Roman Cato.

After the flight of the king in June, and his return in what was virtually captivity to Paris, Condorcet was one of the party, very small in numbers and entirely discountenanced by public opinion, then passing through the monarchical and constitutional stage, who boldly gave up the idea of a monarchy and proclaimed the idea of a republic. In July (1791) he published a piece strongly arguing for a negative answer to the question whether a king is necessary for the preservation of liberty.¹ In one sense, this composition is favourable to Condorcet's foresight; it was only a very few who with him saw that the destruction of the monarchy was inevitable after the royal flight. This want of preparation in the public mind for every great change as it came, is one of the most extraordinary circumstances of the Revolution, and it explains the violent, confused, and inadequate manner in which nearly every one of these changes was made. It was proposed at that time to appoint Condorcet to be governor to the young dauphin. But Condorcet in this piece took such pains to make his sentiments upon royalty known, that in the constitutional frame of mind in which the Assembly then was, the idea had to be abandoned. It was hardly likely that a man should be chosen for such an office who had just declared the public will to be 'that the uselessness of a king, the needfulness of seeking means of replacing a power founded on illusions, should be one of the

(1) xii. 227. It was followed by a letter, nominally by a young mechanic, offering to construct an automaton sovereign, like Kempel's chess-player, who would answer all constitutional purposes perfectly.—*ib.* 239—41.

first truths offered to his reason ; the obligation of concurring in this himself, one of the first of his moral duties ; and the desire not to be freed from the yoke of law by an insulting inviolability, the first sentiment of his heart. People are well aware that at this moment the object is much less to mould a king, than to teach him not to wish to be one.'¹ As all France was then bent on the new constitution, king and all, Condorcet's republican assurance was hardly warranted, and was by no means well received.

III.

When the Constitution was accepted and the Legislative Assembly came to be chosen, Condorcet proved to have made so good an impression as a municipal officer, that the Parisians returned him for one of their deputies. The Declaration of Pilnitz in August (1791), had mitigated the loyalty which had even withstood the trial of the king's flight, and when the Legislative Assembly met, it was found to contain an unmistakable element of republicanism of marked strength. Condorcet was chosen one of the secretaries, and he composed most of those multitudinous addresses in which this most unfortunate and least honoured of all parliamentary chambers tried to prove to the French people that it was actually in existence and at work. Condorcet was officially to the Legislative, what Barère afterwards was to the Convention. But his addresses are turgid, labouring, not effective for their purpose. They have neither the hard force of Napoleon's proclamations, nor the flowery eloquence of the Anacreon of the guillotine. To compose such pieces well under such circumstances as those of the Assembly, a man must have much imagination and a slightly elastic conscience. Condorcet had neither one nor the other, but only

(1) xii. 236.

reason—a hard anvil, out of which he laboriously struck isolated flashes and sounds.

Perhaps, after all, nobody else could have done better. The situation of the Assembly, between a hostile court and a suspicious and distrustful nation, and unable by its very nature to break the bonds, was from the beginning desperate. In December, 1791, the Legislative, through its secretary, informs France of the frankness and loyalty of the king's measures in the face of the menaces of foreign war.¹ Within eight months, when the king's person was in captivity and his power suspended, the same secretary has to avow that from the very beginning the king had treated the Assembly with dissimulation, and had been in virtual league with the national enemies. The documents issued by the Assembly after the violent events of the Tenth of August are not edifying, and imply in Condorcet, who composed them, a certain want of eye for revolutionary methods. They mark the beginning of that short but most momentous period in the history of the Revolution, when formulas, as Mr. Carlyle says, had to be stretched out until they cracked—a process truly called, 'especially in times of swift change, one of the sorrowfullest tasks poor humanity has.' You might read the *Exposition of the Motives from which the National Assembly have proclaimed the Convention, and suspended the Executive Power of the King*,² without dreaming that it is an account of a revolution which arose out of distrust or contempt for the Assembly, which had driven the king away from his palace and from power, and which had finally annihilated the chamber itself, that was thus exposing its motives for doing what the violence of Paris had really done in defiance of it. The power, in fact, was all outside the chamber, in

(1) *Déclaration de l'Assemblée Nationale*, 29 Dec., 1791. *Œuvres*, xii. 25.

(2) August 13, 1792. *Œuvres*, x. 547.

Danton and the Commune. Under such circumstances, it is of no interest to men to learn that 'in the midst of these disasters the National Assembly, afflicted but calm, took its oath to maintain equality and liberty, or to die at its post; took the oath to save France, and looked about for means.'¹ Still more impotent and hollow, because still more pompous, is the address of six days later.² A few days after this, occurred the massacres of prisoners in September—scenes very nearly, if not quite, as bloody and monstrous as those which attended the suppression of the rebellion in Ireland six years afterwards by English troops. The Assembly, the day but one before its final session, issued an address denouncing these infamous crimes;³ and on the whole, the fact that this and the other addresses appealing to law should have been issued, and that the chamber should have continued to sit and transact business, shows to a certain extent that in France at any rate, if not in Paris, the characteristic national respect for authority had not been so entirely blotted out as we are commonly led to suppose.

The Parisians assuredly, or the unbreeched portion of them then dominant, were no lovers of such order as the Assembly could provide; and when the Convention was chosen, the electors of Paris rejected Condorcet. He was elected, however (Sept. 6), for the department of the Aisne, having among his colleagues in the deputation Tom Paine, and—a much more important personage—the youthful Saint-Just, who was so soon to stupefy the Convention by exclaiming, with mellow voice and face set immovable as bronze, 'An individual has no right to be either virtuous or celebrated in your eyes. A free people and a national assembly are not made to admire any-

(1) *Œuvres*, x. 560.(2) 19 Aug. *Œuvres*, x. 565.

(3) 19 Sept., x. 581.

body.' The electors of the department of the Aisne had unconsciously sent two typical revolutionists: the man of intellectual ideas, and the man of passion heated as in the pit. In their persons the Encyclopædia and the guillotine met. Condorcet, who had been extreme in the Legislative, but found himself a moderate in the Convention, gave wise counsel as to the true policy towards the new members: 'Better try to moderate them than quarrel.' But the quarrel between water and fire is irreconcilable.

On the first great question that the Convention had to decide, the fate of the king, Condorcet voted on the two main issues very much as a wise man would have voted, knowing the event as we know it. He voted that the king was guilty of conspiring against liberty, and he voted for the punishment of exile in preference to that of death. On the intermediate question, whether the decision of the Convention should be final, or should be submitted to the people for ratification, he voted as a wise man should not have done, in favour of an appeal to the people, which must inevitably have led to violent and bloody local struggles, and laid France open to the enemy. It is a striking circumstance that, though Condorcet thus voted that the king was guilty, he had previously laid before the Convention a most careful argument to show that they were neither morally nor legally competent to try the king at all. How, he asked, can you act at the same time as legislators constituting the crime, as accusers, and as judges, without violating every principle of jurisprudence? His proposal was that Louis XVI. should be tried by a tribunal whose jury and judges should be named by the electoral body of the departments.¹ With true respect for Condorcet's honourable anxiety that the conditions of justice should be rigorously

(1) *Opinion sur le jugement de Louis XVI.* Nov. 1792. xii. 267—303.

observed—for, as he well said, ‘there is no liberty in a country where positive law is not the single rule of judicial proceedings’—it is difficult to see why the Convention, coming as it did fresh from the electoral bodies, who must have had the question what was to be done with the imprisoned king foremost in their minds, why the members of the Convention should not form as legitimate a tribunal as any body whose composition and authority they had themselves defined and created, and which would be chosen by the same persons who less than a month before had invested them with their own offices. Reading this most scrupulous and juristic composition, we might believe the writer to have forgotten that France lay, mad and frenzied, outside the hall where he stood, and that in political action the question what is possible is at least as important as what is compatible with the maxims of scientific jurisprudence. It was to Condorcet’s honour as a juriconsult that he should have had so many scruples; it is to his credit as a politician that he laid them aside and tried the king after all.

It is highly characteristic of Condorcet’s tenacity of his own view of the Revolution and of its methods, that on the Saturday (January 19, 1793) when the king’s fate was decided against Condorcet’s conviction and against his vote—the execution taking place on the Monday morning—he should have appealed to the Convention, at all events to do their best to neutralise the effect of their verdict upon Europe, by instantly initiating a series of humane reforms in the law which he named, including the abolition of the punishment of death. ‘The English ministers,’ he cried, ‘are now seeking to excite that nation against us. Do you suppose that they will venture to continue their calumnious declamations, when you can say to them: We have abolished the penalty of death, while you still preserve it for the

theft of a few shillings? You hand over debtors to the greed or spite of their creditors; our laws, wiser and more humane, know how to respect poverty and misfortune. Judge between us and you, and see to which of the two peoples the reproach of inhumanity may be addressed with most justice.¹ This was the eve of the Terror. Well may Comte distinguish Condorcet as 'the one philosopher who pursued in the midst of the tempest his regenerating meditations.'²

But let us banish the notion that the history of the Convention is only the history of the guillotine. No chamber, in the whole annals of governing assemblies, ever displayed so much alertness, energy, and capacity, in the face of difficulties that might well have crushed them. Besides their efforts, justly held incomparable, to hurl back the enemy from their frontiers, they at once in the spirit of Condorcet's speech, made at so strange a season, set vigorously about the not less noble task of legal reforms and political reorganisation. The unrivalled ingenuity and fertility of the French character in all the arts of compact and geometric construction never showed itself so supreme. The civil code was drawn up in a month.³ Constitutions abounded. Cynical historians laugh at the eagerness of the nation, during the months that followed the deposition of the king, to have a constitution; and, so far as they believed or hoped that a constitution would remedy all ills, their faith was assuredly not according to knowledge. It shows, however, the fundamental and seemingly ineradicable respect for authority which their history has engendered in the French, that even in this, their most chaotic hour, they craved for order and its symbols.

(1) 19 Jan., 1793. *Œuvres*, xii. 311.

(2) *Politique Pos.*, iii. 596.

(3) See M. Edgar Quinet's remarks on this achievement.—*La Révolution*, ii. 110.

Condorcet, along with Tom Paine, Sièyes, and others, was a member of the first committee for framing a constitution. They laboured assiduously from September to February, 1793, when the project was laid upon the table, prefaced by an elaborate dissertation of Condorcet's composition.¹ The time was inauspicious. The animosities between the Girondins and the Mountain were becoming every day more furious and deadly. In the midst of this appalling storm of rage and hate and terror, Condorcet—at one moment wounding the Girondins by reproaches against their egotism and personalities, at another exasperating the Mountain by declaring of Robespierre that he had neither an idea in his head nor a feeling in his heart—still pertinaciously kept crying out for the acceptance of his constitution. It was of no avail. The revolution of the Second of June came, and swept the Girondins out of the Chamber. Condorcet was not among them, but his political days were numbered. 'What did you do all that time?' somebody once asked of a member of the Convention, during the period which was now beginning and which lasted until Thermidor of 1794. 'I lived,' was the reply. Condorcet was of another temper. He cared as little for his life as Danton or Saint-Just cared for theirs. Instead of cowering down among the men of the Plain or the frogs of the Marsh, he withstood the Mountain to the face.

(1) *Œuvres*, xii. 333, and 417. M. Louis Blanc has contrasted the principles laid down as the basis of this project with Robespierre's rival Declaration of the Rights of Man, printing the two side by side in parallel columns. 'Les voilà donc face à face, après leur commune victoire sur le principe d'autorité, ces deux principes d'individualisme et de fraternité, entre lesquels, aujourd'hui même, le monde balance, invinciblement ému! D'un côté la philosophie du rationalisme pur, qui divise; d'un autre côté la philosophie du sentiment, qui rapproche et réunit. Ici Voltaire et Condorcet, là J. J. Rousseau et Robespierre.' The whole criticism is well worth turning to. *Hist. de la Révol. Fran.*, bk. ix. c. 5.

Hérault de Séchelles, at the head of another committee, brought in a new constitution which was finally adopted and decreed (June 24, 1793). Of this, Sièyes said privately, that it was 'a bad table of contents.' Condorcet denounced it publicly, and with a courage hardly excelled he declared in so many words that the arrest of the Girondins had destroyed the integrity of the national representation. The project itself he handled with a severity that inflicted the keenest smarts on the self-love of its designers. A few days later, the Capucin Chabot, one of those weak and excitable natures that in ordinary times divert men by the intensity, multiplicity, and brevity of their enthusiasms, but to whom the fiercer air of such an event as the Revolution is a veritable poison, rose and, in the name of the Committee of General Security, called the attention of the Chamber to what he styled a sequel of the conspiracy of the Girondist Brissot. This was no more nor less than Condorcet's document criticising the new constitution. 'This man,' said Chabot, 'has sought to raise the department of the Aisne against you, imagining that, because he has happened to sit by the side of some savans of the Academy, it is his duty to give laws to the French Republic.'¹ So a decree was passed putting Condorcet under arrest. His name was included in the list of those who were tried before the Revolutionary Tribunal on the third of October for conspiring against the unity and indivisibility of the Republic; he was condemned in his absence, and declared to be *hors la loi*.

IV.

This, then, was the calamitous close of his aspirations from boyhood upwards to be permitted to partake in doing something for the common weal. He had still the work to perform by

(1) *Extrait du Moniteur. Œuvres*, xii. 677.

which posterity will best remember his name, though only a few months intervened between his flight and his most cruel end. When the decree against him was enacted, he fled. Friends found a refuge for him in the house of a Madame Vernet, a widow in moderate circumstances, who let lodgings to students, and one of those noble and beneficent characters that show us how high humanity can reach. 'Is he an honest and virtuous man?' she asked; 'in that case let him come, and lose not a moment. Even while we talk he may be seized.' The same night Condorcet intrusted his life to her keeping, and for nine months remained in hiding under her roof. When he heard of the execution of the Girondins condemned on the same day with himself, he perceived the risk to which he was subjecting his protector, and made up his mind to flee. 'I am out of the law,' he said, 'and if I am discovered you will be dragged to the same death.' 'The Convention,' Madame Vernet answered, with something of the heroism of more notable women of that time, 'may put you out of the law; it has not the power to put you out of humanity. You stay.' This was no speech of the theatre. The whole household kept the most vigorous watch over the prisoner thus generously detained, and for many months Madame Vernet's humane firmness was successful in preventing his escape. This time, his soul grievously burdened by anxiety as to the fate of his wife and child, by a restless eagerness not to compromise his benefactress, a bloody death staring him every moment in the face, Condorcet spent in the composition, without the aid of a single book, of his memorable work on the progress of the human mind. Among the many wonders of an epoch of portents, this feat of intellectual abstraction is not the least amazing.

When his task was accomplished, Condorcet felt with more

keenness than ever the deadly peril in which his presence placed Madame Vernet. He was aware that to leave her house was to seek death, but he did not fear. He drew up a paper of directions to be one day given to his little daughter, when she should be of years to understand and follow them. They are written with minute care, and though tender and solicitous, with perfect composure. His daughter is above all things to banish from her mind every revengeful sentiment against her father's enemies; to distrust her filial sensibility, and to make this sacrifice for her father's own sake. This done, he marched down-stairs, and having by an artful stratagem thrown Madame Vernet off her guard, went out at ten o'clock in the morning imperfectly disguised into the street. This was the fifth of April, 1794. By three in the afternoon, exhausted by fatigue which his strict confinement for nine months made excessive, he reached the house of a friend in the country, and prayed for a night's shelter. His presence excited less pity than alarm. They gave him refreshment, and he borrowed a little pocket copy of Horace, with which he went forth into the loneliness of the night. He promised himself shelter amid the stone-quarries of Clamart. What he suffered during this night, the whole day of the sixth of April, the night, and again the next day, there is no one to tell.

The door of the house in the Rue Servandoni was left on the latch night and day for a whole week. But Madame Vernet's generous hope was in vain; while she still hoped and watched, the end had come. On the evening of the seventh, Condorcet, with one of his legs torn or broken, his garments in rags, with visage gaunt and hunger-stricken, entered an inn in the hamlet of Clamart, and called for an omelette. Asked how many eggs he would have in it, the famishing man answered a dozen. Carpenters, for such he had given himself to be, do

not have a dozen eggs in their omelettes. Suspicion was aroused, his hands were not the hands of a workman, and he had no papers to show, but only the pocket Horace. The villagers seized him and hastened to drag him, bound hand and foot, to Bourg-la-Reine, then called for a season Bourg-l'Egalité. On the road he fainted, and they set him on a horse offered by a pitying wayfarer. The prison reached, Condorcet, starving, bleeding, way-worn, was flung into his cell. On the morrow, when the gaolers came to seek him, they found him stretched upon the ground, dead and stark. So he perished—of hunger and weariness, say some; of poison ever carried by him in a ring, say others.¹ So, to the last revolving supreme cares, this high spirit was overtaken by annihilation. His memory is left to us, the fruit of his ideas, and the impression of his character.

An eminent man, who escaped by one accident from the hatchets of the Septembriseurs, and by another from the guillotine of the Terror, while in hiding and in momentary expectation of capture and death, wrote thus in condemnation of suicide, 'the one crime which leaves no possibility of return to virtue.' 'Even at this incomprehensible moment'—the spring of 1793—'when morality, enlightenment, energetic love of country, only render death at the prison-wicket or on the scaffold more inevitable; when it might be allowable to choose among the ways of leaving a life that can no longer be preserved, and to rob tigers in human form of the accursed pleasure of dragging you forth and drinking your blood; yes, on the fatal tumbril itself, with nothing free but voice, I could still

(1) The Abbé Morellet, in his narrative of the death of Condorcet (*Mémoires*, c. xxiv.), says that he died of poison, a mixture of stramonium and opium. He adds that the surgeon described death as due to apoplexy.

cry, *Take care, to a child that comes too near the wheel: perhaps he may owe his life to me, perhaps the country shall one day owe its salvation to him.*'¹

More than one career in those days, famous or obscure, was marked by this noble tenacity to lofty public ideas even in the final moments of existence; its general acceptance as a binding duty, exorcising the mournful and insignificant egotisms that haunt and wearily fret and make waste the remnants of so many lives, will produce the profoundest of all possible improvements in men's knowledge of the sublime art of the happiness of their kind. The closing words of Condorcet's last composition show the solace which perseverance in taking thought for mankind brought to him in the depths of personal calamity. He had concluded his survey of the past history of the race, and had drawn what seemed in his eyes a moderate and reasonable picture of its future. 'How this picture,' he exclaims, with the knell of his own doom sounding full in the ear while he wrote, 'this picture of the human race freed from all its fetters, withdrawn from the empire of chance, as from that of the enemies of progress, and walking with firm and assured step in the way of truth, of virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight that consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustice, with which the earth is yet stained, and of which he is not seldom the victim! It is in the contemplation of this picture that he receives the reward of his efforts for the progress of reason, for the defence of liberty. He ventures to link them with the eternal chain of the destinies of man: it is there he finds the true recompense of virtue, the pleasure of having done a lasting good, that fate can no longer undo by any disastrous compensation that shall restore prejudice and bondage. This contemplation is for him a refuge, into

(1) Dupont de Nemours. *Les Physiocrates*, i. 326.

which the recollection of his persecutors can never follow him; in which, living in thought with man reinstated in the rights and the dignity of his nature, he forgets man tormented and corrupted by greed, by base fear, by envy; it is here that he truly abides with his fellows, in an elysium that his reason has known how to create for itself, and that his love for humanity adorns with all purest delights.' ¹

It has long been the fashion among the followers of that reaction which Coleridge led and Mr. Carlyle has spread and popularised, to dwell exclusively on the coldness and hardness, the excess of scepticism and the defect of enthusiasm, that are supposed to have characterised the eighteenth century. Because the official religion of the century both in England and France was lifeless and mechanical, it has been taken for granted that the level of thought and feeling was a low one universally; as if the highest moods of every era necessarily clothed themselves in religious forms. The truth is that, working in such natures as Condorcet's, the principles of the eighteenth century, its homage to reason and rational methods, its exaltation to the highest place of the happiness of men, not excluding their material well-being, its passion for justice and law, its large illumination, engendered a fervour as truly spiritual as that of Catholicism or of Calvinism at their best, while its sentiment was infinitely less interested and personal. The passage just quoted is as little mechanical, as little material, as the most rapturous ejaculations of the Christian saints and confessors; and, read in connection with the circumstances of its composition, may show that the eighteenth century was able at any rate to inspire its sons with a faith that could rob death of its sting and the grave of its victory, as effectually as if it had rested on a mystery instead of on reason, and been supported

(1) *Progrès de l'Esprit Humain. Œuvres*, vi. 276.

by the sanctions of eternal pain and eternal bliss, instead of moving from a confident devotion to humanity.

v.

The shape of Condorcet's ideas upon history arose from the twofold necessity which the structure of his character imposed upon him, at once of appeasing his aspirations on behalf of mankind, and of satisfying a disciplined and scientific intelligence. He was of too robust an understanding to find adequate gratification in the artificial construction of hypothetical utopias. Conviction was as indispensable as hope; and distinct grounds for the faith that was in him, as essential as the faith itself. The result of this fact of mental constitution, the intellectual conditions of the time being what they were, was the rise in his mind of the great and central conception of there being a law in the succession of social states, to be ascertained by an examination of the collective phenomena of past history. The merit of this admirable effort, and of the work in which it found expression, is very easily underrated, because the effort was insufficient and merely preparatory, while modern thought has already carried us far beyond it, and at least into sight of the complete truths to which this effort only pointed the way. Let us remember, however, that it pointed the way distinctly and unmistakably. A very brief survey of the state of history as a subject of systematic study enables us to appreciate with precision what service it was that Condorcet rendered; for it carries us back from the present comparatively advanced condition of the science of society to a time before his memorable attempt, when conceptions now become so familiar were not in existence, and when even the most instructed students of human affairs no more felt the need of a scientific theory of the manner in which social effects follow social

causes, than the least instructed portion of the literary public feels such a need in our own time. It is difficult after a subject has been separated from the nebulous mass of unclassified knowledge, has taken independent shape, and begun to move in lines of its own, to realise the process by which all this was effected, or the way in which before all this the facts concerned presented themselves to the thinker's mind. That we should overcome the difficulty is one of the conditions of our being able to do justice to the great army of the precursors.

Two movements of thought went on in France during the middle of the eighteenth century which have been comparatively little dwelt upon by historians, whose main anxiety has been to justify the foregone conclusion, so gratifying alike to the partisans of the social reaction and to the disciples of modern transcendentalism in its many disguises, that the eighteenth century was almost exclusively negative, critical, and destructive. Each of these two currents was positive in the highest degree, and their influence undeniably constructive, if we consider that it was from their union into a common channel, a work fully accomplished first in the mind of Condorcet, that the notion of the scientific treatment of history and society took its earliest start.

The first of the two movements, and that which has been most unaccountably neglected, consisted in the remarkable attempts of Quesnay and his immediate followers to withdraw the organisation of society from the sphere of empiricism, and to substitute for the vulgar conception of arbitrary and artificial institutions as the sole foundation of this organisation, the idea that there is a certain Natural Order, conformity to which in all social arrangements is the essential condition of their being advantageous to the members of the social union. Natural Order in the minds of this school was no metaphysical figment

evolved from pure consciousness, but a set of circumstances to be discovered by continuous and methodical observation. It consisted of physical law and moral law. The first was the regulated course of every physical circumstance in the order evidently most advantageous to the human race. The second was the rule of every human action of the moral order, conformed to the physical order evidently most advantageous to the human race. This order is the base of the most perfect government, and the fundamental rule of all positive laws ; for positive laws are only the laws required to keep up and maintain the natural order that is evidently most advantageous to the race.¹

Towards the close of the reign of Louis xiv. the frightful impoverishment of the realm attracted the attention of one or two enlightened observers, and among them of Boisguillebert and Vauban. They had exposed, the former of them with especial force and amplitude, the absurdity of the general system of administration, which seemed to have been devised for the express purpose of paralysing both agriculture and commerce, and exhausting all the sources of the national wealth.² But these speculations had been mainly of a fiscal kind, and pointed not much further than to a readjustment of taxation and an improvement in the modes of its collection. The disciples of the New Science, as it was called, the Physiocrats or believers in the supremacy of Natural Order, went much beyond this, and in theory sought to lay open the whole ground of the fabric of society. Practically, they dealt with scarcely any but the economic circumstances of societies, though some of them mix up with their reasonings upon commerce

(1) Quesnay ; *Droit Naturel*, c. 5. *Les Physiocrates*, i. 52.

(2) *Economistes Financiers du 18ième Siècle*. Vauban's *Projet d'une Dime Royale* (p. 33), and Boisguillebert's *Factum de la France*, &c. (p. 248 et seqq.).

and agriculture crude and incomplete hints upon forms of government and other questions that belong not to the economical but to the political side of social science.¹ Quesnay's famous *Maxims* open with a declaration in favour of the unity of the sovereign authority, and against the system of counterbalancing forces in government. Almost immediately he passes on to the proper ground of political economy, and elaborates the conditions of material prosperity in an agricultural realm. With the correctness of the definitions and principles of economic science as laid down by these writers, we have here nothing to do. Their peculiar distinction in the present connection is the grasp which they had of the principle of there being a natural and therefore a scientific order in the conditions of a society; that order being natural in the sense they attached to the term, which from the circumstances of the case is most beneficial to the race. From this point of view they approach some of the problems of what is now classified as social statics; and they assume, without any consciousness of another aspect being possible, that the society which they are discussing is in a state of equilibrium.

It is evident that with this restriction of the speculative horizon, they were and must remain wholly unable to emerge into the full light of the completely constituted science of society, with laws of movement as well as laws of equilibrium, with definite methods of interpreting past and predicting future states. They could account for and describe the genesis of the social union, as Plato and Aristotle had in different ways been able to do many centuries before; and they could prescribe some of the conditions of its being maintained in vigour and compact-

(1) De la Rivière, for instance, very notably. Cf. his *Ordre Naturel des Sociétés Politiques*. *Physiocrates*, ii. 469, 636, &c. See also Baudeau on the superiority of the Economic Monarchy. *Ibid.* pp. 783—791.

ness. Some of them could even see in a vague way the interdependence of peoples and the community of the real interests of different nations, each nation, as De la Rivière expressed it, being only a province of the vast kingdom of nature, a branch from the same trunk as the rest.¹ What they could not see was the great fact of social evolution; and here too, in the succession of social states, there has been a natural and observable order. In a word, they tried to understand society without the aid of history. Consequently they laid down the truths which they discovered as absolute and fixed, when they were no more than conditional and relative.

Fortunately inquirers in another field had set a movement afoot, which was destined to furnish the supplement of their own speculation. This was the remarkable development of the conception of history, which Montesquieu's two memorable books first made conspicuous. Bossuet's well-known discourse on universal history, teeming as it does with religious prejudice, just as Condorcet's sketch teems with prejudice against religion, and egregiously imperfect in execution as it must be pronounced, when judged from even the meanest historical standard, had perhaps partially introduced 'the spirit of universality,' as Comte says, into the study of history. But it was impossible from the nature of the case for any theologian to know fully what this spirit means; and it was not until the very middle of the following century that any effective approach was made to that universality which Bossuet did little more than talk about, and then it came not from theology, but from the much more hopeful sources of a rational philosophy. Before Montesquieu no single stone of the foundation of scientific history can be said to have been laid. Of course, far earlier writers had sought after the circumstances which brought about a given

(1) *Ordre Nat. des Soc. Pol.*, p. 526.

transaction. Thucydides, for example, had attributed the cause of the Peloponnesian war to the alarm of the Lacedæmonians at the greatness of the power of Athens;¹ and it is this sense of the need of explanation, however rudimentary it may be, which distinguishes the great historian from the chronicler, even from a very superior chronicler like Livy, who in his account of even so great an event as the Second Punic War plunges straightway into narrative of what happened, without concerning himself why it happened. Tacitus had begun his *Histories* with remarks upon the condition of Rome, the feeling of the various armies, the attitude of the provinces, so that, as he says, ‘non modo casus eventusque rerum, qui plerumque fortuiti sunt, sed ratio etiam causæque noscantur.’² But these and the like instances in historical literature were only political explanations, more or less adequate, of particular transactions; they were no more than the sagacious remarks of men with statesmanlike minds, upon the origin of some single set of circumstances.

The rise from this to the high degree of generality which marks the speculations of Montesquieu, empirical as they are, was as great as the rise from the mere maxims of worldly wisdom to the widest principles of ethical philosophy. It was he who first applied the comparative method to social institutions; who first considered physical conditions or climate, as we now call the sum of local circumstances, in connection with the laws of a country; who first perceived and illustrated how the natural order which the Physiocrats only considered in relation to the phenomena of wealth and its production, really extended over its political phenomena as well; who first set the example of viewing a great number of social facts all over the world in groups and classes; and who first definitely and

(1) Bk. i. 23.

(2) *Hist.*, i. 4.

systematically inquired into the causes of a set of complex historical events and institutions, as being both discoverable and intelligible. This was a very marked advance upon both of the ideas, by one or other of which men had previously been content to explain to themselves the course of circumstances in the world; either the inscrutable decrees of an inhuman providence, or the fortuitous vagaries of an eyeless destiny.

It was Turgot, however, who completed the historical conception of Montesquieu, in a piece written in 1750, two years after the appearance of the *Esprit des Lois*, and in one or two other fragmentary compositions of about the same time, which are not the less remarkable because the writer was only twenty-three years old when these advanced ideas presented themselves to his intelligence. Vico in Italy had insisted on the doctrine that the course of human affairs is in a cycle, and that they move in a constant and self-repeating orbit.¹ Turgot, on the contrary, with more wisdom, at the opening of his subject is careful to distinguish the ever-varying spectacle of the succession of men from generation to generation, from the circle of identical revolutions in which the phenomena of nature are enclosed. In the one case time only restores at each instant the image of what it has just caused to disappear: in the other, the reason and the passions are ever incessantly producing new events. 'All the ages are linked together by a succession of causes and effects which bind the state of the world to all the states that have gone before. The multiplied signs of speech and writing, in supplying men with the means of an assured possession of their thoughts and of communicating them to one

(1) The well-known words of Thucydides may contain the germ of the same idea, when he speaks of the future as being likely to represent again, after the fashion of human things, 'if not the very image, yet the near resemblance of the past,' i. 22. 4.

another, have formed a common treasure that one generation transmits to another, as an inheritance constantly augmented by the discoveries of each generation; and the human race, looked at from its origin, appears in the eyes of the philosopher one immense whole, which, just as in the case of each individual, has its infancy and its growth.'¹

Pascal and others in ancient and modern times² had compared in casual and unfruitful remarks the history of the race to the history of the individual, but Turgot was able in some sort to see the full meaning and extent of the analogy, as well as the limitations proper to it, and to draw from it some of the larger principles which the idea involved. The first proposition in the passage just quoted, that a chain of causes and effects unites each age with every other age that has gone before, is one of the most memorable sentences in the history of thought. And Turgot not only saw that there is a relation of cause and effect between successive states of society; he had glimpses into some of the conditions of that relation. To a generation that stands on loftier heights his attempts seem rudimentary and strangely simple, but it was these attempts which cut the steps for our ascent. How is it, he asked, for instance, that the succession of social states is not uniform; that they follow with unequal step along the track marked out for them? He found the answer in the inequality of natural advantages, and he was able to discern the necessity of including in these advantages the presence, apparently accidental, in some communities and not in others of men of especial genius or capacity in some important direction.³ Again, he saw that just as in one way natural advantages accelerate the progress of a society, in

(1) *Discours en Sorbonne. Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 597. (Edition of 1844.)

(2) Cf. Sir G. C. Lewis's *Methods of Observation in Politics*, ii. 439, note.

(3) *Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 592, 645, &c.

another natural obstacles also accelerate it, by stimulating men to the efforts necessary to overcome them : *le besoin perfectionne l'instrument*.¹ The importance of following the march of the human mind over all the grooves along which it travels to further knowledge was fully present to him, and he dwells repeatedly on the constant play going on between discoveries in one science and those in another. In no writer is there a fuller and more distinct sense of the essential unity and integrity of the history of mankind, nor of the multitude of the mansions in which this vast house is divided, and the many keys which he must possess that would open and enter in.

Even in empirical explanations he shows a breadth and accuracy of vision truly striking, considering his own youth and what we may venture to call the youth of his subject. The reader will be able to appreciate this, and to discern at the same time the arbitrary nature of Montesquieu's method, if he will contrast, for example, the remarks of this writer upon polygamy with the far wider and more sagacious explanation of the circumstances of such an institution given by Turgot.² Unfortunately, he has left us only short and fragmentary pieces, but they suggest more than many large and complete works. That they had a very powerful and direct influence upon Condorcet there is no doubt, as well from the similarity of general conception between him and Turgot, as from the nearly perfect identity of leading passages in their writings. Let us add that in Turgot's fragments we have what is unhappily not a characteristic of Condorcet, the peculiar satisfaction and delight in scientific history of a style which states a fact in such phrases as serve also to reveal its origin, bearings,

(1) *Œuvres de Turgot*, ii. 601.

(2) *Esprit des Loix*, xvi. cc. 2—4. And *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, in Turgot's Works, ii. 640—641.

significance ; in which every successive piece of description is so worded as to be self-evidently a link in the chain of explanation, an ordered term in a series of social conditions.

Before returning to Condorcet, we ought to glance at the remarkable piece, written in 1784, in which Kant propounded his idea of a universal or cosmo-political history, that contemplating the agency of the human will upon a large scale should unfold to our view a regular stream of tendency in the great succession of events.¹ The will metaphysically considered, Kant said, is free, but its manifestations, that is to say, human actions, 'are as much under the control of universal laws of nature as any other physical phenomena.'

The very same course of incidents, which taken separately and individually would have seemed perplexed and incoherent, 'yet viewed in their connection and as the action of the human *species* and not of independent beings, never fail to observe a steady and continuous though slow development of certain great predispositions in our nature.' As it is impossible to presume in the human race any *rational* purpose of its own, we must seek to observe some *natural* purpose in the current of human actions. Thus a history of creatures with no plan of their own, may yet admit a systematic form as a history of creatures blindly pursuing a plan of nature. Now we know that all predispositions are destined to develop themselves according to their final purpose. Man's rational predispositions are destined to develop themselves in the species and not in the individual. History then is the progress of the development of all the tendencies laid in man by nature. The method of development is the antagonism of these tendencies in the social state, and its source the *unsocial sociality* of man—a tendency to enter the

(1) *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan*. It was translated by De Quincey, and is to be found in vol. xiii. of his collected works, pp. 133—152.

social state, combined with a perpetual resistance to that tendency, which is ever threatening to dissolve it. The play of these two tendencies unfolds talents of every kind, and by gradual increase of light a preparation is made for such a mode of thinking as is capable of 'exalting a social concert that had been *pathologically* extorted from the mere necessities of situation, into a *moral* union founded on the reasonable choice.' Hence the highest problem for man is the establishment of a universal civil society, founded on the empire of political justice; and 'the history of the human species as a whole may be regarded as the unravelling of a hidden plan of nature for accomplishing a perfect state of civil constitution for society in its internal relations (and, as the condition of that, in its external relations also), as the sole state of society in which the tendencies of human nature can be all and fully developed.' Nor is this all. We shall not only be able to unravel the intricate web of past affairs, but shall also find a clue for the guidance of future statesmen in the art of political prediction. Nay more, this clue 'will open a consolatory prospect into futurity, in which at a remote distance we shall observe the human species seated upon an eminence won by infinite toil, where all the germs are unfolded which nature has implanted, and its destination on this earth accomplished.'

That this conception involves an assumption about tendencies and final purposes which reverses the true method of history, and moreover reduces what ought to be a scientific inquiry to be a foregone justification of nature or providence, should not prevent us from appreciating its signal merits in insisting on a systematic presentation of the collective activity of the race, and in pointing out, however cursorily, the use of such an elucidation of the past in furnishing the grounds of practical guidance in dealing with the future and in preparing it. Con-

sidering the brevity of this little tract, its pregnancy and suggestiveness have not often been equalled. We have seen enough of it here to enable us to realise the differences between this and the French school with its wholesome objectivity, resulting from the stage which had been reached in France by the physical sciences. Condorcet's series of éloges shows unmistakably how deep an impression the history of physical discovery had made upon him, and how clearly he understood the value of its methods. The peculiar study which their composition had occasioned him, is of itself almost enough to account for the fact that a conception which had long been preparing in the superior minds of the time, should fully develop itself in him rather than in anybody else.

VI.

The Physiocrats, as we have seen, had introduced the idea of there being a natural order in social circumstances, that order being natural which is most advantageous to mankind. Turgot had declared that one age is bound to another by a chain of causation. Condorcet fused these two conceptions. He viewed the history of the ages as a whole, and found in their succession a natural order; an order which when uninterrupted and undisturbed tended to accumulate untold advantages upon the human race, which was every day becoming more plain to the vision of men, and therefore every day more and more assured from disturbance by ignorant prejudice and sinister interests. There is an order at once among the circumstances of a given generation, and among the successive sets of circumstances of successive generations. 'If we consider the development of human faculties in its results relating to the individuals who exist at the same time on a given space, and if we follow it from generation to generation, then we have before us the

picture of the progress of the human mind. This progress is subject to the same general laws that are to be observed in the development of the faculties of individuals, for it is the result of that development, considered at the same time in a great number of individuals united in society. But the result that presents itself at any one instant depends upon that which was offered by the instants preceding; in turn it influences the result in times still to follow.'

This picture will be of a historical character, inasmuch as being subject to perpetual variations it is formed by the observation in due order of different human societies in different epochs through which they have passed. It will expose the order of the various changes, the influence exercised by each period over the next, and thus will show in the modifications impressed upon the race, ever renewing itself in the immensity of the ages, the track that it has followed, and the exact steps that it has taken towards truth and happiness. Such observation of what man has been and of what he is, will then lead us to means proper for assuring and accelerating the fresh progress that his nature allows us to anticipate still further.¹

'If a man is able to predict with nearly perfect confidence, phenomena with whose laws he is acquainted; if, even when they are unknown to him, he is able, in accordance with the experience of the past, to foresee with a large degree of probability the events of the future; why should we treat it as a chimerical enterprise to trace with some verisimilitude the picture of the future destinies of the human race in accordance with the results of its history? The only foundation of belief in the natural sciences is this idea, that the general laws known or unknown which regulate the phenomena of the universe are necessary and constant; and why should this principle be less

(1) *Tableau des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain. Œuvres*, vi. 12, 13.

true for the development of the moral and intellectual faculties of man than for other natural operations? In short, opinions grounded on past experience in objects of the same order being the single rule of conduct for even the wisest men, why should the philosopher be forbidden to rest his conjectures on this same base, provided he never attributes to them a degree of certainty beyond what is warranted by the number, the constancy, and the accuracy of his observations ?''¹

Thus Condorcet's purpose was not to justify nature, as it had been with Kant, but to search in the past for rational grounds of a belief in the unbounded splendour of men's future destinies. His view of the character of the relations among the circumstances of the social union, either at a given moment or in a succession of periods, was both accurate and far-sighted. When he came actually to execute his own great idea, and to specify the manner in which those relations arose and operated, he instantly diverged from the right path. Progress in his mind is exclusively produced by improvement in intelligence. It is the necessary result of man's activity in the face of that disproportion ever existing between what he knows and what he desires and feels the necessity to know.² Hence the most fatal of the errors of Condorcet's sketch. He measures only the contributions made by nations and eras to what we know; leaving out of sight their failures and successes in the elevation of moral standards and ideals, and in the purification of the passions.

Now even if we hold the intellectual principle only to be progressive, and the moral elements to be fixed, being coloured and shaped and quickened by the surrounding intellectual conditions, still, inasmuch as the manner of this shaping and colouring is continually changing and leading to the most

(1) vi. 236.

(2) vi. 21.

important transformations of human activity and sentiment, it must obviously be a radical deficiency in any picture of social progress to leave out the development of ethics, whether it be a derivative or an independent and spontaneous development. One seeks in vain in Condorcet's sketch for any account of the natural history of Western morals, or for any sign of consciousness on his part that the difference in ethical discipline and feeling between the most ferocious of primitive tribes and the most enlightened eighteenth-century Frenchmen, was a result of evolution that needed historical explanation, quite as much as the difference between the astrolatry of one age and the astronomy of another. We find no recognition of the propriety of recounting the various steps of that long process by which, to use Kant's pregnant phrase, the relations born of pathological necessity were metamorphosed into those of moral union. The grave and lofty feeling, for example, which inspired the last words of the *Tableau*—whence came it? Of what long-drawn chain of causes in the past was it the last effect? It will not do to refer us generally to previous advances in knowledge and intellectual emancipation, because even supposing the successive modifications of our moral sensibilities to be fundamentally due to the progress of intellectual enlightenment, we still want to know in the first place something about the influences which harness one process to the other, and in the second place, something about the particular directions which these modifications of moral constitution have taken.

If this is one very radical omission in Condorcet's scheme, his angry and vehement aversion for the various religions of the world (with perhaps one exception) is a sin of commission still more damaging to its completeness. That he should detest the corrupt and oppressive forms of religion of his own century was neither surprising nor blamable. An unfavour-

able view of the influences upon human development of the Christian belief even in its least corrupt forms was not by any means untenable. Nay, he might without absurdity have gone further than this, and depicted religion as a natural infirmity of the human mind in its immature stages, just as there are specific disorders incident in childhood to the human body. Even on this theory, he was bound to handle it with the same calmness which he would have expected to find in a pathological treatise by a physician. Who would write of the sweating sickness with indignation, or describe zymotic diseases with resentment? Condorcet's pertinacious anger against theology is just as irrational as this would be, from the scientific point of view which he pretends to have assumed. Theology, in fact, was partly avenged of her assailants, for she had in the struggle contrived to infect them with the contagion of her own traditional spirit.

From the earliest times to the latest it is all one story according to Condorcet. He can speak with respect of philosophies even when, as in the case of the Scotch school of the last century, he dislikes and condemns them.¹ Of religion his contempt and hatred only vary slightly in degree. Barbarous tribes have sorcerers, trading on the gross superstitions of their dupes; so in other guise and with different names have civilised nations to-day. As other arts progressed, superstition too became less rude; priestly families kept all knowledge in their own hands, and thus preserved their hypocritical and tyrannical assumptions from detection. They disclosed nothing to the people without some supernatural admixture, the better to maintain their personal pretensions. They had two doctrines, one for themselves and the other for their people; sometimes, as they were divided into several orders, each of them reserved

(1) vi. 186.

to itself certain mysteries. Thus all the inferior orders were at once rogues and dupes, and the great system of hypocrisy was only known in all its completeness to a few adepts. Christianity belonged to the same class. Its priests, we must admit, 'in spite of their knaveries and their vices, were enthusiasts ready to perish for their doctrines.' In vain did Julian endeavour to deliver the empire from the scourge. Its triumph was the signal for the incurable decay of all art and knowledge. The Church may seem to have done some good in things where her interests did not happen to clash with the interests of Europe, as in helping to abolish slavery, for instance; but after all 'circumstances and manners' would have produced the result necessarily and of themselves. Morality, which was taught by the priests only, contained those universal principles that have been unknown to no sect; but it created a host of purely religious duties, and of imaginary sins. These duties were more rigorously enjoined than those of nature, and actions that were indifferent, legitimate, or even virtuous, were more severely rebuked and punished than real crimes. Yet, on the other hand, a moment of repentance, consecrated by the absolution of a priest, opened the gates of heaven to the worst miscreants.¹

In the opening of the last of these remarks there is much justice. So there is in the striking suggestion made in another place, that we should not bless erroneous systems for their utility, simply because they help to repair some small part of the mischief of which they have themselves been the principal cause.² But on the whole it is obvious that Condorcet was unfitted by his temper and that of the school to which he most belonged from accepting religion as a fact in the history of the

(1) *Œuvres*, vi. pp. 35, 55, 101, 102, 111, 117, 118, &c.

(2) *Dissertation sur cette question : S'il est utile aux hommes d'être trompés ?*—one of the best of Condorcet's writings. *Œuvres*, v. 360.

human mind, that must have some positive explanation. To look at it in this way as the creation of a handful of selfish impostors in each community, was to show a radical incompetence to carry out the scheme which had been so scientifically projected. The picture is ruined by the angry caricature of what ought to have been one of the most important figures in it; to this place the Christian church is undeniably entitled, however we may be disposed to strike the balance between the undoubted injuries and the undoubted advantages which it has been the means of dealing to the civilisation of the west. Never perhaps was there so thorough an inversion of the true view of the comparative elevation of different parts of human character, as is implied in Condorcet's strange hint that Cromwell's satellites would have been much better men if they had carried instead of the bible at their saddle-bows some merry book of the stamp of Voltaire's *Pucelle*.¹

Apart from the misreading of history in explaining religion by the folly of the many and the frauds of a few, Condorcet's interpretation involved the profoundest infidelity to his own doctrine of the intrinsic purity and exaltation of human nature. This doctrine ought in all reason to have led him to look for the secret of the popular acceptance of beliefs that to him seemed most outrageous, in some possibly finer side which they might possess for others, appealing not to the lower but to the higher qualities of a nature with instincts of perfection. Take his account of purgatory, for instance. The priests, he says, drew up so minute and comprehensive a table of sins that nobody could hope to escape from censure. Here you come upon one of the most lucrative branches of the sacerdotal trafficking; people were taught to imagine a hell of limited

(1) See Condorcet's vindication of the *Pucelle* in his *Life of Voltaire*. *Œuvres*, iv. 48—89.

duration, which the priests only had the power to abridge; and this grace they sold, first to the living, then to the kinsmen and friends of the dead.¹ Now it was surely more worthy of a belief in the natural depravity than in the natural perfectibility of the sons of Adam, thus to assume without parley or proviso a base mercenariness on the one hand and grovelling terror on the other, as the origin of a doctrine which was obviously susceptible of a kinder explanation, that should refer it to a merciful and affectionate and truly humanising anxiety to assuage the horrors of what is perhaps the most frightful idea that has ever corroded human character, the idea of eternal punishment. We could in part have pardoned Condorcet if he had striven to invent ever so fanciful origins for opinions and belief in his solicitude for the credit of humanity. As it is, he distorts the history of religion only to humanity's discredit. How, if the people were always predisposed to virtue, were priests, sprung of the same people and bred in the same traditions, so invariably and incurably devoted to baseness and hypocrisy? Was the nature of a priest absolutely devoid of what physicians call recuperative force, restoring them to a sound mind in spite of professional perversion? In fine, if man had been so grossly enslaved in moral nature from the beginning of the world down to the year 1789 or thereabouts, how was it possible that notwithstanding the admitted slowness of civilising processes, he should suddenly spring forth the very perfectible and nearly perfected being that Condorcet passionately imagined him to be?²

(1) vi. 118.

(2) As M. Comte says in his remarks on Condorcet (*Phil. Pos.*, iv. 185—193), 'Le progrès total finalement accompli ne peut être sans doute que le résultat général de l'accumulation spontanée des divers progrès partiels successivement réalisés depuis l'origine de la civilisation, en vertu de la marche successivement lente et graduelle de la nature humaine;' so that Condorcet's picture presents a

It has already been hinted that there was one partial exception to Condorcet's otherwise all-embracing animosity against religion. This was Mahometanism. Towards this his attitude is fully appreciative, though of course he deplores the superstitions which mixed themselves up with the Arabian prophet's efforts for the purification of the men of his nation. After the seven vials of fiery wrath have been poured out upon the creed of Palestine, it is refreshing to find the creed of Arabia almost patronised and praised. The writer who could not have found in his heart to think Gregory the Great or Hildebrand other than a mercenary impostor, nor Cromwell other than an ambitious hypocrite, admits with exquisite blandness of Mahomet that he had the art of employing all the means of subjugating men *avec adresse, mais avec grandeur*.¹ Another reason, no doubt, besides his hatred of the Church lay at the bottom of Condorcet's tolerance or more towards Mahometanism. The Arabian superstition was not fatal to knowledge. On the contrary, it was among its professors and disciples that the torch of science was kept alive, while in Christendom it lay trampled down and extinct. Arabian activity in algebra, chemistry, optics, and astronomy, atoned in Condorcet's eyes for the Koran.

It is fair to add further, that Condorcet showed a more just appreciation of the effects of Protestantism upon Western development than has been common among French thinkers. He recognises that men who had learnt, however imperfectly, to submit their religious prejudices to rational examination, would naturally be likely to extend the process to political prejudices

standing miracle, 'où l'on s'est même interdit d'abord la ressource vulgaire de la Providence.' Comte's criticism, however, seems to leave out of sight what full justice Condorcet did to the various partial advances in the intellectual order.

(1) vi. 120—123.

also. Moreover, if the reformed churches refused to render to reason all its rights, still they agreed that its prison should be less narrow; the chain was not broken, but it ceased to be either so heavy or so short as it had been. And in countries where what was insolently styled tolerance by the dominant sect succeeded in establishing itself, it was possible to maintain the tolerated doctrines with a more or less complete freedom. So there arose in Europe a sort of freedom of thought, not for men, but for Christians; and, 'if we except France, it is only for Christians that it exists anywhere else at the present day,' a limitation which has now fortunately ceased to be altogether exact.¹

If we have smiled at the ease with which what is rank craftiness in a Christian is toned down into address in a Mahometan, we may be amused too at the leniency that describes some of the propagandist methods of the eighteenth century. Condorcet becomes rapturous as he tells in a paragraph of fine sustention with what admixture of the wisdom of the serpent the humane philosophers of his century 'covered the truth with a veil that prevented it from hurting too weak sight, and left the pleasure of conjecturing it; caressing prejudices with address, to deal them the more certain blows; scarcely ever threatening them, nor ever more than one at once, nor even one in its integrity; sometimes consoling the enemies of reason by pretending to desire no more than a half-tolerance in religion and a half-liberty in politics; conciliating despotism while they combated the absurdities of religion, and religion when they rose against despotism; attacking these two scourges in their principle, even when they seemed only to bear ill-will to revolting or ridiculous abuses, and striking these poisonous trees in their very roots, while they appeared to be doing no

(1) vi. 149, and 153.

more than pruning crooked branches.'¹ Imagine the holy rage with which such acts would have been attacked, if Condorcet had happened to be writing about the Jesuits. Alas! the stern and serene composure of the historical conscience was as unknown to him as it is always to orthodox apologists. It is to be said, moreover, that he had less excuse for being without it, for he rested on the goodness of men, and not as theologians do on their vileness. It is a most interesting thing, we may notice in passing, to consider what was the effect upon the Revolution of this artfulness or prudence with which its theoretic precursors sowed the seed. Was it as truly wise as Condorcet supposed? Or did it weaken, almost corrupt, the very roots? Was it the secret of the thoroughness with which the work of demolition was done? Was it, too, the secret of the many and disastrous failures in the task of reconstruction?²

There are one or two detached remarks suggested by Condorcet's picture, which it may be worth while to make. He is

(1) vi. 187—189.

(2) It is worth while to quote on this subject a passage from Condorcet as historically instructive as it is morally dangerous. 'La nécessité de mentir pour désavouer un ouvrage est une extrémité qui répugne également à la conscience et à la noblesse du caractère; mais le crime est pour les hommes injustes qui rendent ce désaveu nécessaire à la sûreté de celui qu'ils y forcent. Si vous avez érigé en crime ce qui n'en est pas un, si vous avez porté atteinte, par des lois absurdes ou par des lois arbitraires, au droit naturel qu'ont tous les hommes, non seulement d'avoir une opinion, mais de la rendre publique, alors vous méritez de perdre celui qu'a chaque homme d'entendre la vérité de la bouche d'un autre, droit qui fonde seul l'obligation rigoureuse de ne pas mentir. S'il n'est pas permis de tromper, c'est parceque tromper quelqu'un, c'est lui faire un tort, ou s'exposer à lui en faire un; mais le tort suppose un droit, et personne n'a celui de chercher à s'assurer les moyens de commettre une injustice.' *Vie de Voltaire; Œuvres*, iv. 33, 34. Condorcet might have found some countenance for his sophisms in Plato (*Republ.* ii. 383); but even Plato restricted the privilege of lying to statesmen (*iii.* 389). He was in a wiser mood when he declared (*Œuvres*, v. 384) that it is better to be imprudent than a hypocrite,—though for that matter these are hardly the only alternatives.

fully alive, for example, to the importance to mankind of the appearance among them of one of those men of creative genius, like Archimedes or like Newton, whose lives constitute an epoch in human history; their very existence he saw to be among the greatest benefits conferred on the race by Nature. He hardly seems to have been struck, on the other hand, with the appalling and incessant waste of these benefits that goes on; with the number of men of Newtonian capacity who are undoubtedly born into the world only to chronicle small beer; with the hosts of high and worthy souls who labour and flit away like shadows, perishing in the accomplishment of minor and subordinate ends. We may suspect that the notion of all this immeasurable profusion of priceless treasures, its position as one of the laws of the condition of man on the globe, would be unspeakably hard of endurance to one holding Condorcet's peculiar form of optimism.

Again, if we had space, it would be worth while to examine some of the acute and ingenious hints which Condorcet throws out by the way: to consider, as he suggests, the influence upon the progress of the human mind of the change from writing on science, philosophy, and jurisprudence in Latin, to the usual language of each country,—a change which rendered the sciences more popular, but increased the trouble of the scientific men in following the general march of knowledge; which caused a book to be read in one country by more men of inferior competence, but less read throughout Europe by men of superior light; which relieves men who have no leisure for extensive study of the trouble of learning Latin, but imposes upon profounder persons the necessity of learning a variety of modern languages.¹ Again, ground is broken for the most important reflection in the remark that 'men preserve the

(1) vi. 163.

prejudices of their childhood, their country, and their age, long after they have recognised all the truths necessary to destroy them ;'¹ and in this, that the progress of physical knowledge is constantly destroying in silence erroneous opinions which had never seemed to be attacked.² And in reading history, how much ignorance and misinterpretation would have been avoided, if the student had remembered that 'the law as written and the law as administered ; the principles of those in power, and the modification of their action by the sentiments of the governed ; an institution as it emanates from those who form it, and the same institution realised ; the religion of books, and that of the people ; the apparent universality of a prejudice, and the substantial adhesion that it receives ; may all differ in such a way that the effects absolutely cease to answer to the public and recognised causes.'³

VII.

We have now seen something of Condorcet's ideas of the past, and of his conception of what he was perhaps the first to call the Science of Man. Let us turn to his hopes for the future, and one or two of the details to which his study of the science of man conducted him. It is well to perceive at the outset that Condorcet's views of the Tenth Epoch, as he counts the period extending from the French Revolution to the era of the indefinite perfection of man, were in truth not the result of any scientific processes whatever, properly so called. He saw, and this is his merit, that such processes were applicable to the affairs of society ; and that, as he put it, all political and moral errors rest upon error in philosophy, which in turn is bound up with erroneous methods in physical science.⁴ But in the execution of his plan he does not succeed in showing the

(1) vi. 22.

(2) p. 220.

(3) p. 234.

(4) p. 223.

nature of the relations of these connected forces ; still less does he practise the scientific duty, for illustrating which he gives such well-deserved glory to Newton,¹ of not only accounting for phenomena, but also of measuring the *quantity* of forces. His conception, therefore, of future progress, however near conjecture may possibly have brought him to the truth, is yet no more than conjecture. The root of it is found in nothing more precise, definite, or quantified than a general notion gathered from history, that some portions of the race had made perceptible advances in freedom and enlightenment, and that we might therefore confidently expect still further advances to be made in the same direction with an accelerated rapidity, and with certain advantageous effects upon the happiness of the whole mass of the human race. In short, the end of the speculation is a confirmed and heightened conviction of the indefinite perfectibility of the species, with certain foreshadowings of the direction which this perfectibility would ultimately follow. The same rebellion against the disorder and misery of the century which drove some thinkers and politicians into fierce yearnings for an imaginary state of nature, and others into an extravagant admiration for the ancient republics, caused a third school, and Condorcet among them, to turn their eyes with equally boundless confidence and yearning towards an imaginary future. It was at all events the least hopeless error of the three.

Our expectations for the future, Condorcet held, may be reduced to these three points : the destruction of inequality among nations ; the progress of equality among the people of any given nation ; and, finally, the substantial perfecting (*perfectionnement réel*) of man. *I.* With reference to the first of these great aspirations, it will be brought about by the abandonment by European peoples of their commercial monopolies,

(1) p. 206.

their treacherous practices, their mischievous and extravagant proselytising, and their sanguinary contempt for those of another colour or another creed. Vast countries, now a prey to barbarism and violence, will present in one region numerous populations only waiting to receive the means and instruments of civilisation from us, and as soon as they find brothers in the Europeans, will joyfully become their friends and pupils; and in another, nations enslaved under the yoke of despots or conquerors, crying aloud for so many ages for liberators. In yet other regions, it is true, there are tribes almost savage, cut off by the harshness of their climate from a perfected civilisation, or else conquering hordes, ignorant of every law but violence, and every trade but brigandage. The progress of these last two descriptions of people will naturally be more tardy, and attended by more storm and convulsion; perhaps even, reduced in number, in proportion as they see themselves repulsed by civilised nations, they will end by insensibly disappearing.¹ It is perhaps a little hard, by the way, to expect Esquimaux or the barbaric marauders of the sandy expanses of Central Asia insensibly to disappear, lest by their cheerless presence they should destroy the unity and harmony of the transformation scene in the great drama of Perfectibility.

II. The principal causes of the inequality that unfortunately exists among the people of the same community are three in number—inequality in wealth; inequality of condition between the man whose means of subsistence are both assured and transmissible, and him for whom these means depend upon the duration of his working life; thirdly, inequality of instruction. How are we to establish a continual tendency in these three sources of inequality to diminish in activity and power? To lessen, though not to demolish, inequalities in wealth, it will

(1) pp. 239—244.

be necessary for all artificial restrictions and exclusive advantages to be removed from fiscal or other legal arrangements, by which property is either acquired or accumulated; and among social changes tending in this direction will be the banishment by public opinion of an avaricious or mercenary spirit from marriage. Again, inequality between permanent and precarious incomes will be radically modified by the development of the application of the calculation of probabilities to life; the extension of annuities and insurance will not only benefit many individuals, but will benefit society at large by putting an end to that periodical ruin of a large number of families, which is such an ever-renewing source of misery and degradation. Another means to the same end will be found in discovering, by the same doctrine of probabilities, some other base, not less solid, for credit than a large capital, and for rendering the progress of industry and the activity of commerce more independent of the existence of great capitalists. Something approaching to equality of instruction, even for those who can only spare a few of their early years for study, and in after times only a few hours of leisure, will become more attainable by improved selection of subjects, and improved methods of teaching them. The dwellers in one country will cease to be distinguished by the use of a rude or of a refined dialect; and this, it may be said in passing, has actually been the result of the school system in the United States. One portion of them will no longer be dependent upon any other for guidance in the smallest affairs. We cannot obliterate nor ignore natural differences of capacity, but after public instruction has been properly developed, 'the difference will be between men of superior enlightenment, and men of an upright character (*esprit droit*) who feel the value of light without being dazzled by it; between talent or genius and that good sense which knows

how to appreciate and enjoy both ; and even if this difference were greater than has been said, if we compare the force and extent of faculty, it would become none the less insensible, if we compare their respective effects upon the relations of men among themselves, upon all that effects their independence and their happiness.'¹

III. What are the changes which we may expect from the substantial perfecting of human nature and society ? If, before making this forecast, we reflect with what feeble means the race has arrived at its present knowledge of useful and important truths, we shall not fear the reproach of temerity in our anticipations for a time when the force of all these means shall have been indefinitely increased. The progress of agricultural science will make the same land more productive and the same labour more effective. Nay, who shall predict what the art of converting elementary substance into food for our use may one day become ? The constant tendency of population to advance to the limit of the means of subsistence thus amplified, will be checked by a rising consciousness in men that if they have obligations in respect of creatures still unborn, these obligations consist in giving them not existence but happiness, in adding to the well-being of the family, and not cumbering the earth with useless and unfortunate beings. This changed view upon population will partly follow from the substitution of rational ideas for those prejudices which have penetrated morals with an austerity that is corrupting and degrading.² The movement will be further aided by one of the most important steps in human progress—the destruction, namely, of the prejudices which have established inequality of rights between the two sexes, so mischievous even to the sex that is favoured.³ We

(1) pp. 244—251.

(2) pp. 257, 258.

(3) Condorcet had already assailed the prejudices that keep women in subjec-

seek in vain for any justification of such an inequality in difference of physical organisation, in force of intelligence, or in moral sensibility. It has no other origin than abuse of strength, and it is to no purpose that attempts are made to excuse it by sophisms. The destruction of the usages springing from this custom will render common those domestic virtues which are the foundation of all others, and will encourage education as well as make it more general, both because instruction would be imparted to both sexes with more equality, and because it can only become general even for males with the aid of the mother of the family.¹

Among other improvements under our third head will be the attainment of greater perfection in language, leading at once to increased accuracy and increased concision. Laws and institutions, following the progress of knowledge, will be constantly undergoing modifications tending to identify individual with collective interests. Wars will grow less frequent with

tion in an excellent tract, published in 1790. *Sur l'Admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité. Œuvres*, x. 121—130. The reader will find a translation of it at the end of the present volume.

(1) p. 264. The rest of the passage is not perfectly intelligible to me, so I give it as it stands. 'Cet hommage trop tardif, rendu enfin à l'équité et au bon sens, ne tarirait-il pas une source trop féconde d'injustices, de cruautés et de crimes, en faisant disparaître une opposition si dangereuse entre le penchant naturel le plus vif, le plus difficile à réprimer, et les devoirs de l'homme ou les intérêts de la société? Ne produirait-il pas, enfin, des mœurs nationales douces et pures, formées non de privations orgueilleuses, d'apparences hypocrites, de réserves imposées par la crainte de la honte ou les terreurs religieuses, mais d'habitudes librement contractées, inspirées par la nature, avouées par la raison?' Can these habits be the habits of Free Love, or what are they? Condorcet, we know, thought the indissolubility of marriage a monstrously bad thing, but the grounds which he gives for his thinking so would certainly lead to the infinite dissolubility of society. See a truly astounding passage in the Fragment on the Tenth Epoch, vi. 523—526. See also some curious words in a letter to Turgot, i. 221, 222.

the extinction of those ideas of hereditary and dynastic rights, which have occasioned so many bloody contests. The art of learning will be facilitated by the institution of a Universal Language; and the art of teaching by resort to Technical Methods or systems which unite in orderly arrangement a great number of different objects, so that their relations are perceived at a single glance.¹

Finally, progress in medicine, the use of more wholesome food and healthy houses, the diminution of the two most active causes of deterioration, misery and excessive wealth, must prolong the average duration of life, as well as raise the tone of health while it lasts. The force of transmissible diseases will be gradually weakened, until their quality of transmission vanishes. May we then not hope for the arrival of a time when death will cease to be anything but the effect either of extraordinary accidents, or of the destruction, ever slower and slower, of the vital forces? May we not believe that the duration of the middle interval between birth and this destruction has no assignable term? Man will never become immortal, but is it a mere chimera to hold that the term fixed to his years is slowly and perpetually receding further and further from the moment at which his existence begins?²

The rapidity and the necessary incompleteness with which Condorcet threw out in isolated hints his ideas of the future state of society, impart to his conception a certain mechanical aspect, which conveys an incorrect impression of his notion of the sources whence social change must flow. His admirable and most careful remarks upon the moral training of children prove him to have been as far removed as possible from any of those theories of the formation of character which merely pre-

(1) pp. 269—272.

(2) pp. 272—275. Also p. 618.

scribe the imposition of moulds and casts from without, instead of carefully tending the many spontaneous and sensitive processes of growth within.¹ Nobody has shown a finer appreciation of the delicacy of the material out of which character is to be made, and of the susceptibility of its elementary structure; nor of the fact that education consists in such a discipline of the primitive impulses as shall lead men to do right, not by the constraint of mechanical external sanctions, but by an instant, spontaneous, and almost inarticulate repugnance to cowardice, cruelty, apathy, self-indulgence, and the other great roots and centres of wrong-doing. It was to a society composed of men and women whose characters had been shaped on this principle that Condorcet looked for the realisation of his exalted hopes for humanity.²

With machinery and organisation, in truth, Condorcet did not greatly concern himself; probably too little rather than too

(1) See *Fragment de l'Histoire de la X^e Epoque*. 'Il ne faut pas leur dire, mais les accoutumer à croire, à trouver au dedans d'eux-mêmes, que la bonté et la justice sont nécessaires au bonheur, comme une respiration facile et libre l'est à la santé.' Of books for the young: 'Il faut qu'ils n'excèdent jamais l'étendue ou la délicatesse de la sensibilité.' 'Il faut renoncer à l'idée de parler aux enfans de ce que ni leur esprit ni leur âme ne peuvent encore comprendre; ne pas leur faire admirer une constitution et réciter par cœur les droits politiques de l'homme quand ils ont à peine une idée nette de leurs relations avec leur famille et leurs camarades.'

Still more objectionable, we may be sure, would he have found the practice of drilling little children by the hearth or at the school-desk in creeds, catechisms, and the like repositories of mysteries baleful to the growing intelligence. '*Aidons les développemens des facultés humaines pendant la faiblesse de l'enfance*,' he said admirably, '*mais n'abusons pas de cette faiblesse pour les mouler au gré de nos opinions, de nos intérêts, ou de notre orgueil*.'—*Œuvres*, vi. 543—554.

Cf. also v. 363—365; where there are some deserved strictures on the malpractice of teaching children as truth what the parents themselves believe to be superstition or even falsehood.

(2) His *Mémoires sur l'Instruction Publique*, written in 1791—2, and printed in the seventh volume of the works, are still very well worth turning to.

much. The central idea of all his aspirations was to procure the emancipation of reason, free and ample room for its exercise, and improved competence among men in the use of it. The subjugation of the modern intelligence beneath the disembodied fancies of the grotesque and sombre imagination of the Middle Ages, did not offend him more than the idea of any fixed organisation of the spiritual power, or any final and settled and universally accepted solution of belief and order would have done. With De Maistre and Comte the problem was the organised and systematic reconstruction of an anarchic society. With Condorcet it was how to persuade men to exert the individual reason methodically and independently, not without co-operation, but without official or other subordination.

His cardinal belief and precept was, as with Socrates, that the *βίος ἀνεξέταστος* is not to be lived by man. As we have seen, the freedom of the reason was so dear to him, that he counted it an abuse for a parent to instil his own convictions into the defenceless minds of his young children. This was the natural outcome of Condorcet's mode of viewing history as the record of intellectual emancipation, while to Comte its deepest interest was as a record of moral and emotional cultivation. If we value in one type of thinker the intellectual conscientiousness which refrains from perplexing men by propounding problems unless the solution can be set forth also, perhaps we owe no less honour in the thinker of another type to that intellectual self-denial which makes him very careful lest the too rigid projection of his own specific conclusions should by any means obstruct the access of a single ray of fertilising light. This religious scrupulosity, which made him abhor all interference with the freedom and openness of the understanding as the worst kind of sacrilege, was Condorcet's eminent distinction. If, as some think, the world will gradually

transform its fear or love of unknowable gods into a devout reverence for those who have stirred in men a sense of the dignity of their own nature and of its large and multitudinous possibilities, then will his name not fail of deep and perpetual recollection.

JOSEPH DE MAISTRE.

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OWING to causes which lie tolerably near the surface, the remarkable Catholic reaction which took place in France at the beginning of the present century has never received in England the attention it deserves; not only for its striking interest as an episode in the history of European thought, but also for its peculiarly forcible and complete presentation of those ideas with which what is called the modern spirit is supposed to be engaged in deadly war. For one thing, the Protestantism of England strips a genuinely Catholic movement of speculation of that pressing and practical importance which belongs to it in countries where nearly all spiritual sentiment, that has received any impression of religion at all, unavoidably runs in Catholic forms. With us the theological reaction against the ideas of the eighteenth century was not and could not be other than Protestant. The defence and reinstatement of Christianity in each case was conducted, as might have been expected, with reference to the dominant creed and system of the country. If Coleridge had been a Catholic, his works thus newly coloured by an alien creed would have been read by a small sect only, instead of exercising as they did a wide influence over the whole nation, reaching people through those usual conduits of press and pulpit, by which the products of philosophic thought are conveyed to unphilosophic minds. As naturally in France, hostility to all those influences which were believed to have brought about the Revolution, to sensationalism in metaphysics, to atheism in what should have been theology, to the

notion of the sovereignty of peoples in politics, inevitably sought a rallying-point in a renewed allegiance to that prodigious spiritual system which had fostered the germs of order and social feeling in Europe, and whose name remains even now in the days of its ruin, as the most permanent symbol and exemplar of stable organisation. Another reason for English indifference to this movement is the rapidity with which here, as elsewhere, dust gathers thickly round the memory of the champions of lost causes. Some of the most excellent of human characteristics, intensity of belief, for example, and a fervid anxiety to realise aspirations, unite with some of the least excellent of them, to make us too habitually forget that the best adherents of a fallen standard in philosophy, in religion, in politics, are usually next in all good qualities of understanding and sentiment to the best of those who lead the van of the force that triumphs. Men are not so anxious as they should be, considering the infinite diversity of effort that goes to the advancement of mankind, to pick up the fragments of truth and positive contribution, that so nothing be lost, and as a consequence the writings of antagonists with whom we are believed to have nothing in common, lie unexamined and disregarded.

In the case of the group of writers who, after a century of criticism, ventured once more with an intrepid confidence, differing fundamentally from the tone of preceding apologists in the Protestant camp, who were nearly as critical as the men they refuted, to vindicate not the bare outlines of Christian faith, but the entire scheme in its extreme manifestation of the most ancient and severely maligned of all Christian organisations, this apathy is very much to be regretted on several grounds. In the first place, it is impossible to see intelligently to the bottom of the momentous spirit of ultramontanism, which is so deep a difficulty of continental Europe, and

which, touching us in Ireland, is perhaps already one of our own deepest difficulties, without comprehending in its best shape the theory on which ultramontaniam rests; and this theory it is impossible to seize at all thoroughly, without some knowledge of the ideas of its most efficient defenders in its earlier years. Secondly, it is among these ideas that we have to look for the representation in their most direct, logical, uncompromising, and unmistakable form, of those theological ways of regarding life and prescribing right conduct, whose more or less rapidly accelerated destruction is the first condition of the further elevation of humanity, as well in power of understanding as in morals and spirituality. In all contests of this kind there is the greatest and most obvious advantage in being able to see your enemy full against the light. Thirdly, in one or two respects, the Catholic reactionaries at the beginning of the century insisted very strongly on principles of society which the general thought of the century before had almost entirely dropped out of sight, and which we, who, in spite of many differences, still sail down the same great current, and are propelled by the same great tide, are accustomed almost equally either to leave in the background of speculation, or else deliberately to deny and suppress. Such we may account the importance which they attach to organisation; and the value they set upon a common spiritual faith and doctrine as a social basis. That the form which the recognition of these principles is destined to assume will at all correspond to their hopes and anticipations, is one of the most unlikely things possible; this, however, need not detract from the worth for our purpose of their exposition of the principles themselves. Again, the visible traces of the impression made by the writings of this school on the influential founder of the earliest Positivist system, are sufficiently deep and important to make some know-

ledge of them of the highest historical interest, both to those who accept and those who detest that system; because, accepted or detested, Positivism is being every day more and more clearly perceived to be one of the great battle-fields of modern philosophic and social controversy.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were three chief schools of thought, the Sensational, the Catholic, and the Eclectic; or as it may be put in other terms, the Materialist, the Theological, and the Spiritualist. The first looked for the sources of knowledge, the sanctions of morals, the inspiring fountain and standard of æsthetics, to the outside of men, to matter, and the impressions made by matter on the corporeal senses. The second looked to divine revelation, authority, and the traditions of the Church. The third, steering a middle course, looked partly within and partly without, relied partly on the senses, partly on revelation and history, but still more on a certain internal consciousness of a direct and immediate kind, that is the supreme and reconciling judge of the reports alike of the senses, of history, of divine revelation.¹ Each of these schools had many exponents. The three most conspicuous champions of revived Catholicism were De Maistre, De Bonald, and Chateaubriand. The last of them, the author of the *Génie du Christianisme*, was effective in France because he is so deeply sentimental, but he was too little trained in speculation, and too little equipped with knowledge, to be fairly taken as the best intellectual representative of their way of thinking. De Bonald was of much heavier calibre; he really thought, while Chateaubriand only felt, and the *Législation Primitive* and the *Pensées sur Divers Sujets* contain much that an enemy of the school will find it worth

(1) See Damiron's *La Philosophie en France au XIXème Siècle*. Introduction to Vol. I. (Fifth edition.)

while to read, in spite of an artificial, and, if a foreigner may judge, detestable style.

De Maistre was the greatest of the three, and deserves better than either of the others to stand as the type of the school for many reasons. His style is so marvellously lucid, that, notwithstanding the mystical, or, as he said, the illuminist side of his mind, we can never be in much doubt about his meaning, which is not by any means the case with Bonald. To say nothing of his immensely superior natural capacity, his extensive reading in the literature of his foes was a source of remarkable strength, which might indeed have been thought indispensable, if only other persons had not attacked the same people as he did, without knowing much or anything at first-hand about them. Then he goes over the whole field of allied subjects, which we have a right to expect to have handled by anybody with a systematic view of the origin of knowledge, the meaning of ethics, the elements of social order and progressiveness, the government and scheme of the universe. And above all, his writings are penetrated with the air of reality and life which comes of actual participation in the affairs of that world with which social philosophers have to deal. Lamennais had in many respects a finer mind than De Maistre, but the conclusions in which he was finally landed, no less than his liberal aims, make him a less completely satisfactory example of the truly Catholic reaction. He in fact represented the Revolution, or the critical spirit, within the Catholic limits, while De Maistre's ruling idea was, in his own trenchant phrase, 'absolument tuer l'esprit du dix-huitième siècle.' On all these accounts he appears to be the fittest expositor of those conceptions which the anarchy that closed the eighteenth century provoked into systematic existence.

I.

Joseph de Maistre was born at Chambéry in the year 1754.¹ His family was the younger branch of a stock in Languedoc, which about the beginning of the seventeenth century divided itself into two, one remaining in France, the other establishing itself in Piedmont. It is not wonderful that the descendants of the latter, settled in a country of small extent and little political importance, placed a high value on their kinship with an ancient line in the powerful kingdom of France. Joseph de Maistre himself was always particularly anxious to cultivate close relations with his French kinsfolk, partly from the old aristocratic feeling of blood, and partly from his intellectual appreciation of the gifts of the French mind, and its vast influence as an universal propagating power. His father held a high office in the government of Savoy, and enjoyed so eminent a reputation that on his death both the Senate and the King of Sardinia deliberately recorded their appreciation of his loss as a public calamity. His mother is said to have been a woman of lofty and devout character, and her influence over her eldest son was exceptionally strong and tender. He used to declare in after life that he was as docile in her hands as the youngest of his sisters. Among other marks of his affectionate submission to parental authority, we are told that during the whole time of his residence at Turin, where he followed a course of law, he never read a single book without previously writing to Chambéry to one or other of his parents for their sanction. Such traditions linger in families, and when he came to have

(1) The facts of De Maistre's life I have drawn from a very meagre biography by his son, Count Rodolphe de Maistre, supplemented by two volumes of *Lettres et Opuscules* (Fourth edition. Paris: Vaton. 1865), and a volume of his Diplomatic Correspondence, edited by M. Albert Blanc.

children of his own, they too read nothing of which their father had not been asked to express his approbation. De Maistre's early education was directed by the Jesuits; and as might have been expected from the generous susceptibility of his temper, he never ceased to think of them with warm esteem. To the end of his life he remembered the gloom which fell upon the household, though he was not nine years old at the time, when the news arrived of the edict of 1762, abolishing the Society in the kingdom of France. One element of his education he commemorates in a letter to his favourite daughter. 'Let your brother,' he says, 'work hard at the French poets. Let him learn them by heart, especially the incomparable Racine; never mind whether he understands him yet or not. I didn't understand him when my mother used to come repeating his verses by my bedside, and lulled me to sleep with her fine voice to the sound of that inimitable music. I knew hundreds of lines long before I knew how to read; and it is thus that my ears, accustomed betimes to this ambrosia, have never since been able to endure any sorer draught.'

After his law studies at the University of Turin, then highly renowned for its jurisconsults, the young De Maistre went through the successive stages of an official career, performing various duties in the public administration, and possessing among other honours a seat in the Senate, over which his father presided. He led a tranquil life at Chambéry, then as at all other times an ardent reader and student. Unaided he taught himself five languages. English he mastered so perfectly, that though he could not follow it when spoken, he could read a book in that tongue with as much ease as if it had been in his own. To Greek and German he did not apply himself until afterwards, and he never acquired the same proficiency in them as in English, French, Italian, Latin, and

Spanish. To be ignorant of German then, it will be remembered, was not what it would be now, to be without one of the literary senses.

Like nearly every other great soldier of reaction, he showed in his early life a decided inclination for new ideas. The truth that the wildest extravagances of youthful aspiration are a better omen of a vigorous and enlightened manhood than the decorous and ignoble faith in the perfection of existing arrangements, was not belied in the case of De Maistre. His intelligence was of too hard and exact a kind to inspire him with the exalted schemes, that present themselves to those more nobly imaginative minds who dream dreams and see visions. He projected no Savoyard emigration to the banks of the Susquehanna or Delaware, there to found a millennial community on pantisocratic principles. These generous madresses belong to men of more poetic temper. But still, in spite of the deadening influences of officialism and relations with a court, De Maistre had far too vigorous and active a character to subside without resistance into the unfruitful ways of obstruction and social complacency. It is one of the most certain marks, we may be sure, of a superior spirit, that the impulses earliest awakened by its first fresh contact with the facts of the outer world, are those which quicken a desire for the improvement of the condition of society, the increase of the happiness of men, the amelioration of human destiny. With this unwritten condition of human nature De Maistre, like other men of his mental calibre, is found to have complied. He incurred the suspicion and ill-will of most of those by whom he was immediately surrounded by belonging to a Reform Lodge at Chambéry. The association was one of a perfectly harmless character, but being an association, it diffused a tarnishing vapour of social disaffection and insurgency over the names of

all who ventured to belong to it, and De Maistre was pointed out to the Sardinian court as a man with leanings towards new things, and therefore one of whom it were well to beware. There was little ground for apprehension. In very small countries there is never room enough for the growth of a spirit of social revolution; not at least until some great and dominant country has released the forces of destruction. For this there is needed a huge momentum and impetus, that is only to be acquired over a vast field. Small states have usually been the most tenacious of old institutions, unless some violent hostility of race or caste is at work. So, when the menacing sounds of the approaching hurricane in France grew heavy in the air, the little lodge at Chambéry voluntarily dissolved itself, and De Maistre was deputed to convey to the king, Victor Amédée III., the honourable assurance of its members that they had assembled for the last time.

In 1786, at the age of thirty-two, De Maistre had married, and when the storm burst which destroyed all the hopes of his life, he was the father of two children. In one of his gay letters to a venerable lady who was on intimate terms with them both, he has left a picture of his wife, which is not any less interesting for what it reveals of his own character. 'The contrast between us two is the very strangest in the world. For me, as you may have found out, I am the *pocourante* senator, and above all things very free in saying what I think. She, on the contrary, will take care that it is noon before allowing that the sun has risen, for fear of committing herself. She knows what must be done or must not be done on the tenth of October, 1808, at ten o'clock in the morning, to avoid some inconvenience which otherwise would come to pass at midnight between the fifteenth and sixteenth of March, 1810. "But, my dear husband, you pay attention to nothing; you

believe that nobody is thinking of any harm. Now I know, I have been told, I have guessed, I foresee, I warn you," etc. "Come now, my dear, leave me alone. You are only wasting your time: I foresee that I shall never foresee things: that's your business." She is the supplement to me, and hence when I am separated from her, as I am now, I suffer absurdly from being obliged to think about my own affairs; I would rather have to chop wood all day. . . . My children ought to kiss her very steps; for my part, I have no gift for education. She has one that I look upon as nothing less than the eighth gift of the Holy Ghost; I mean a certain fond persecution by which it is given her to torment her children from morning to night to do something, not to do something, to learn,—and yet without for a moment losing their tender affection for her. How ever does she manage? I cannot make it out a bit.' She was laughingly called by himself and her friends, Madame Prudence. It is certain that few women have found more necessity for the qualities implied in this creditable nickname.

They had not been married many years before they were overtaken by irreparable disaster. The French Revolution broke out, and Savoy was invaded by the troops of the new Republic. Count de Maistre, with his wife and children, fled from Chambéry across the Alps to Aosta. 'Ma chère amie,' he said to his wife, by the side of a great rock which he never afterwards forgot, 'the step that we are taking to-day is irrevocable; it decides our lot for life;' and the presentiment was true. Soon the *Loi des Allobroges* was promulgated, which enjoined upon all who had left their homes in Savoy to return instantly, under pain of confiscation of all their property. It was the very depth of winter. Madame de Maistre was in the ninth month of her pregnancy. She knew that her husband would endure anything rather than expose her to risk such a

journey in such a season. So, urged by a desire to save something from the wreck of their fortune by compliance with the French decree, she seized the opportunity of her husband's absence at Turin, and started for Savoy without acquainting him with her design. She crossed the Great St. Bernard in the beginning of January on the back of a mule, accompanied by her two little children wrapped in blankets. The Count, on his return to Aosta two or three days afterwards, forthwith set off in her steps, in the trembling expectation of finding her dead or dying in some Alpine hovel. But the favour of fate and a stout heart brought her safe to Chambéry, where shortly afterwards she was joined by her husband. The authorities vainly tendered him the oath, vainly bade him inscribe his name on the register of citizens; and when they asked him for a contribution to support the war, he replied curtly that he did not give money to kill his brothers in the service of the King of Sardinia. As soon as his wife was delivered of their third child, whom he was destined not to see again for nearly twenty years, he quitted her side, abandoned his property and his country, and took refuge at Lausanne, where in time his wife and his two eldest children once more came to him.

Gibbon tells us how a swarm of emigrants, escaping from the public ruin, was attracted by the vicinity, the manners, and the language of Lausanne. 'They are entitled to our pity,' he reflected, 'and they may claim our esteem, but they cannot in their present state of mind and fortune contribute much to our amusement. Instead of looking down as calm and idle spectators on the theatre of Europe, our domestic harmony is somewhat embittered by the infusion of party spirit.' Gibbon died in London almost at the very moment that De Maistre arrived at Lausanne, but his account of things remained true, and political feuds continued to run as high as ever. Among

the people with whom De Maistre was thrown was Madame de Staël. 'As we had not been to the same school,' he says, 'either in theology or in politics, we had some scenes enough to make one die of laughter; still without quarrelling. Her father, who was then alive, was the friend and relative of people that I love with all my heart, and that I would not vex for all the world. So I allowed the *émigrés* who surrounded us to cry out as they would, without ever drawing the sword.' De Maistre thought he never came across a head so completely turned wrong as Madame de Staël's, the infallible consequence, as he took it to be, of modern philosophy operating upon a woman's nature. He once said of her, 'Ah! if Madame de Staël had been Catholic, she would have been adorable, instead of famous.' We can believe that his position among the French *émigrés* was not particularly congenial. For though they hated the Revolution, they had all drunk of the waters of the eighteenth century philosophy, and De Maistre hated this philosophy worse than he hated the Revolution itself. Then, again, they would naturally vapour about the necessities of strong government. 'Yes,' said the Savoyard exile, 'but be quite sure that, to make the monarchy strong, you must rest it on the laws, avoiding everything arbitrary, too frequent commissions, and all ministerial jobberies.' We may well believe how unsavoury this rational and just talk was to people who meant by strong government a system that should restore to them their old prerogatives of anti-social oppression and selfish corruption. The order that De Maistre vindicated was a very different thing from the deadly and poisonous order which was the object of the vows of incorrigible royalists around him.

After staying three years at Lausanne, De Maistre went to Turin, but shortly afterwards the Sardinian king, after a long struggle, was forced to succumb to the power of the French,

then in the full tide of success. The brilliant Italian campaign of General Bonaparte needs no words here. The French entered Turin, and De Maistre, being an *émigré*, had to leave it. Furnished with a false passport, and undergoing a thousand hardships and dangers, he made his way, once more in the depth of a severe winter (1797), to Venice. He went part of the way down the Po in a small trading ship, crowded with ladies, priests, monks, soldiers, and a bishop. There was only one small fire on board, at which all the cooking had to be done, and where the unhappy passengers had to keep themselves warm as they could. At night they were confined each to a space about three planks broad, separated from neighbours by pieces of canvas hanging from a rope above. Each bank of the river was lined by military posts—the left by the Austrians, and the right by the French; and the danger of being fired into was constantly present to aggravate the misery of overcrowding, scanty food, and bitter cold. Even this wretchedness was surpassed by the hardships which confronted the exiles at Venice. The physical distress endured here by De Maistre and his unfortunate family exceeded that of any other period of their wanderings. He was cut off from the court, and from all his relations and friends, and reduced for the means of existence to a few fragments of silver plate, which had somehow been saved from the general wreck. This slender resource grew less day by day, and when that was exhausted the prospect was a blank. The student of De Maistre's philosophy may see in what crushing personal anguish some of its most sinister growths had their roots. When the cares of beggary come suddenly upon a man in middle life, they burn very deep. Alone, and starving for a cause that is dear to him, one might encounter the grimness of fate with a fortitude in which there should be many elevating and consoling

elements. But the destiny is intolerably hard which condemns a man of humane mould, as De Maistre certainly was, to look helplessly on the physical pains of a tender woman and famishing little ones. The anxieties that press upon his heart in such calamity as this are too sharp, too tightened, and too sordid for him to draw a single free breath, or to raise his eyes for a single moment of relief from the monstrous perplexity that chokes him. The hour of bereavement has its bitterness, but the bitterness is gradually suffused with soft reminiscence. The grip of beggary leaves a dark and deep mark on such a character as De Maistre's, which no prosperity of after days effaces. The seeming inhumanity of his theory of life, which is so revolting to comfortable people like M. Villemain, was in truth the only explanation of his own cruel sufferings in which he could find any solace. It was not that he hated mankind; but that his destiny looked as if God hated him, and this was a horrible moral complexity out of which he could only extricate himself by a theory in which pain and torment seem to stand out as the main facts in human existence.

To him, indeed, prosperity never came. Hope smiled on him momentarily, but, in his own words, '*ce n'était qu'un éclair dans la nuit.*' While he was in Venice, the armies of Austria and Russia re-conquered the north of Italy, and Charles Emanuel iv., in the natural anticipation that the allies would at once restore his dominions, hastened forward. Austria, however, as De Maistre had seen long before, was indifferent or even absolutely hostile to Sardinian interests, and she successfully opposed Charles Emanuel's restoration. The king received the news of the perfidy of his nominal ally at Florence, but not until after he had made arrangements for rewarding the fidelity of some of his most loyal adherents.

It was from Florence that De Maistre received the king's

nomination to the chief place in the government of the island of Sardinia. Through the short time of his administration here, he was overwhelmed with vexations only a little more endurable than the physical distresses which had weighed him down at Venice. During the war, justice had been administered in a very irregular manner. Hence, people had taken the law into their own hands, and retaliation had completed the round of wrong-doing. The taxes were collected with great difficulty. The higher class, after the manner of their order, exhibited an invincible repugnance to paying their debts. Some of these difficulties in the way of firm and orderly government were insuperable, and De Maistre vexed his soul in an unequal and only partially successful contest. In after years, amid the miseries of his life in Russia, he wrote to his brother thus: 'Sometimes in my moments of solitude that I multiply as much as I possibly can, I throw my head back on the cushion of my sofa, and there with my four walls around me, far from all that is dear to me, confronted by a sombre and impenetrable future, I recall the days when in a little town that you know well,' he meant Cagliari, 'with my head resting on another sofa, and only seeing around our own exclusive circle, (good heavens, what an impertinence!) little men and little things, I used to ask myself, "Am I then condemned to live and die in this place, like a limpet on a rock?"' I suffered bitterly; my head was overloaded, wearied, flattened, by the enormous weight of Nothing.'

But presently a worse thing befell him. In 1802 he received an order from the king to proceed to St. Petersburg as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at the Russian court. Even from this bitter proof of his devotion to his sovereign he did not shrink. He had to tear himself from his wife and children, without any certainty when so cruel a

separation would be likely to end; to take up new functions which the circumstances of the time rendered excessively difficult; while the petty importance of the power he represented, and its mendicant attitude in Europe, robbed his position of that public distinction and dignity which may richly console a man for the severest private sacrifice. It is a kind destiny which veils their future from mortal men. Fifteen years passed before De Maistre's exile came to a close. From 1802 to 1817, he did not quit the inhospitable latitudes of northern Russia.

De Maistre's letters during this desolate period furnish a striking picture of his manner of life and his mental state. We see in them his most prominent characteristics strongly marked. Not even the painfulness of the writer's situation ever clouds his intrepid and vigorous spirit. Lively sallies of gallant humour to his female friends, sagacious judgments on the position of Europe to political people, bits of learned criticism for erudite people, tender and playful chat with his two daughters, all these alternate with one another with the most delightful effect. Whether he is writing to his little girl whom he has never known, or to the king of Sardinia, or to some author who sends him a book, or to a minister who has found fault with his diplomacy, there is in all alike the same constant and remarkable play of a bright and penetrating intellectual light, coloured by a humour that is now and then a little sardonic, but more often is genial and lambent. There is a certain semi-latent quality of hardness lying at the bottom of De Maistre's style, both in his letters and in his more elaborate compositions. His writings seem to recall the flavour and bouquet of some of the fortifying and stimulating wines of Burgundy, from which time and warmth have not yet drawn out a certain native roughness that lingers on the palate. This

hardness, if one must give the quality a name that only imperfectly describes it, sprang not from any original want of impressionableness or sensibility of nature, but partly from the relentless buffetings which he had to endure at the hands of fortune, and partly from the preponderance which had been given to the rational side of his mind by long-habits of sedulous and accurate study. Few men knew so perfectly as he did how to be touching without ceasing to be masculine, nor how to go down into the dark pits of human life without forgetting the broad sunlight, nor how to keep habitually close to visible and palpable fact while eagerly addicted to speculation. His contemplations were perhaps somewhat too near the ground; they led him into none of those sublimer regions of subtle feeling where the rarest human spirits have loved to travel; we do not think of his mind among those who have gone

Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.

If this kind of temper, strong, keen, frank, and a little hard and mordant, brought him too nigh a mischievous disbelief in the dignity of men and their lives, at least it kept him well away from morbid weakness in ethics, and from beating the winds in metaphysics. But of this we shall see more in considering his public pieces than can be gathered from his letters.

The discomforts of De Maistre's life at St. Petersburg were extreme. The dignity of his official style and title was an aggravation of the exceeding straitness of his means. The ruined master could do little to mitigate the ruin of his servant. He had to keep up the appearance of an ambassador on the salary of a clerk. 'This is the second winter,' he writes to his brother in 1810, 'that I have gone through without a pelisse, which is exactly like going without a shirt at Cagliari. When I come from court a very sorry lackey throws a common

cloak over my shoulders.' The climate suited him better than he had expected; and in one letter he vows that he was the only living being in Russia who had passed two winters without fur boots and a fur hat. It was considered indispensable that he should keep a couple of servants; so for his second De Maistre was obliged to put up with a thief, whom he rescued under the shelter of ambassadorial privilege from the hands of justice, on condition that he would turn honest. The Austrian ambassador, with whom he was on good terms, would often call to take him out to some entertainment. 'His fine servants mount my staircase groping their way in the dark, and we descend preceded by a servant carrying *luminare minus ut præesset nocti*.' 'I am certain,' he adds pleasantly, 'that they make songs about me in their Austrian patois. Poor souls, it is well they can amuse themselves.'

Sometimes he was reduced so far as to share the soup of his valet, for lack of richer and more independent fare. Then he was constantly fretted by enemies at home, who disliked his trenchant diplomacy, and distrusted the strength and independence of a mind which was too vigorous to please the old-fashioned ministers of the Sardinian court. These chagrins he took as a wise man should. They disturbed him less than his separation from his family. 'Six hundred leagues away from you all,' he writes to his brother, 'the thoughts of my family, the reminiscences of childhood, transport me with sadness.' Visions of his mother's saintly face haunted his chamber; almost gloomier still was the recollection of old intimates with whom he had played, lived, argued, and worked for years, and yet who now no longer bore him in mind. There are not many glimpses of this melancholy in the letters meant for the eye of his beloved *trinité féminine*, as he playfully called his wife and two daughters. 'A quoi bon vous attrister,' he asked bravely,

‘sans raison et sans profit?’ Occasionally he cannot help letting out to them how far his mind is removed from composure. ‘Every day as I return home I find my house as desolate as if it was yesterday you left me. In society the same fancy pursues me, and scarcely ever quits me.’ Music, as might be surmised in so sensitive a nature, drove him wild with its mysterious power of intensifying the dominant emotion. ‘Whenever by any chance I hear the harpsichord,’ he says, ‘melancholy seizes me. The sound of the violin gives me such a heavy heart, that I am fain to leave the company and hasten home.’ He tossed in his bed at night, thinking he heard the sound of weeping at Turin, making a thousand efforts to picture to himself the looks of that ‘orphan child of a living father’ whom he had never known, wondering if he ever should know her, battling with a myriad of black phantoms that seemed to rustle in his curtains. ‘But you, M. de Chevalier,’ he said apologetically to the correspondent to whom he told these dismal things, ‘you are a father, you know the cruel dreams of a waking man; if you were not of the profession, I would not allow my pen to write you this jeremiad.’ As De Maistre was accustomed to think himself happy if he got three hours’ sound sleep in the night, these sombre and terrible vigils were ample enough to excuse him if he had allowed them to overshadow all other things. But the vigour of his intellect was too strenuous, and his curiosity and interest in every object of knowledge too inextinguishable. ‘After all,’ he said, ‘the only thing to do is to put on a good face, and to march to the place of torture with a few friends to console you on the way. This is the charming image under which I picture my present situation. Mark you,’ he added, ‘I always count books among one’s consoling friends.’

In one of the most gay and charming of his letters, apolo-

gising to a lady for the remissness of his correspondence, he explains that diplomacy and books occupy every moment. 'You will admit, madame, there is no possibility of one's shutting up books entirely. Nay, more than ever, I feel myself burning with the feverish thirst for knowledge. I have had an access of it which I cannot describe to you. The most curious books literally run after me, and hurry voluntarily to place themselves in my hands. As soon as diplomacy gives me a moment of breathing-time, I rush headlong to that favourite pasture, to that ambrosia of which the mind can never have enough,—

Et voilà ce qui fait que votre ami est muet.'

He thinks himself happy if, by refusing invitations to dinner, he can pass a whole day without stirring from his house. 'I read, I write, I study; for after all one must know something.' In his hours of depression, he fancied that he only read and worked, not for the sake of the knowledge, but to stupefy and tire himself out, if that were possible.

As a student De Maistre was indefatigable. He never belonged to that languid band who hope to learn difficult things by easy methods. The only way, he warned his son, is to shut your door, to say that you are not within, and to work. 'Since they have set themselves to teach us how we ought to learn the dead languages, you can find nobody who knows them; and it is amusing enough that people who don't know them should be so obstinately bent on demonstrating the vices of the methods employed by us who do know them.' He was one of those wise and laborious students who do not read without a pen in their hands. He never shrank from the useful toil of transcribing abundantly from all the books he read everything that could be by any possibility even-

tually be of service to him in his inquiries. His note-books were enormous. As soon as one of them was filled, he carefully made up an index of its contents, numbered it, and placed it on a shelf with its unforgotten predecessors. In one place he accidentally mentions that he had some thirty of these folios over the head of his writing-table.

‘If I am a pedant at home,’ he said, ‘at least I am as little as possible of a pedant out of doors.’ In the evening he would occasionally seek the society of ladies, by way of recovering some of that native gaiety of heart which had hitherto kept him alive. ‘I blow on this spark,’ to use his own words, ‘just as an old woman blows among the ashes to get a light for her lamp.’ A student and a thinker, De Maistre was also a man of the world, and he may be added to the long list of writers who have shown that, to take an active part in public affairs and to mix in society, give a peculiar life, reality, and force to both scholarship and speculation. It was computed at that time that the author of a philosophic piece could not safely count upon more than a hundred and fifty readers in Russia; and hence, we might be sure, even if we had not De Maistre’s word for it, that away from his own house he left his philosophy behind. The vehemence of his own convictions did not prevent him from being socially tolerant to others who hated them. ‘If I had the good fortune to be among his acquaintances,’ he wrote of a heretical assailant, ‘he would see that among the people with convictions it would be hard to find one so free from prejudice as I am. I have many friends among the Protestants, and now that their system is tottering, they are all the dearer to me.’ In spite of his scanty means, his shabby valet, his threadbare cloak, and the humbleness of his diplomatic position, the fire and honesty of his character both combined with his known ability to place him high in the

esteem of the society of St. Petersburg. His fidelity, devotion, and fortitude, mellowed by many years and by meditative habits, and tinged perhaps by the patrician consciousness of birth, formed in him a modest dignity of manner which men respected, perceiving it to be no artificial assumption, but the outward image of a lofty and self-respecting spirit. His brother diplomatists, even the representatives of France, appear to have treated him with marked consideration. His letters prove him to have been a favourite among ladies. The Emperor Alexander showed him considerable kindness of the cheap royal sort, conferring on his brother, Xavier de Maistre, a post in one of the public museums, while to the Sardinian envoy's son he gave a commission in the Russian service.

The first departure of this son for the campaign of 1807 occasioned some of the most charming passages in De Maistre's letters, both to the young soldier himself and to others. For, though without a touch of morbid expansiveness, he never denied himself the solace of opening his heart to a trusted friend, and a just reserve with strangers did not hinder a humane and manly confidence with intimates. 'Ce matin,' he wrote to his stripling, soon after he had joined the army, 'j'ai éprouvé un grand serrement de cœur lorsque *Biribi*'—a pet dog—'est entré en courant, et qu'il est sauté sur votre lit où vous n'êtes plus. Il a tôt bien compris son erreur, et il a dit très clairement à sa manière, *Je me suis trompé; où est-il donc?* Quant à moi j'ai senti tout ce que vous sentirez si jamais vous exercez ce grand emploi de père. . . . Souvenez vous que vous êtes toujours devant mes yeux comme mes paupières.' And he then begs of his son if he should find himself with a tape line in his hand, that he will take his exact measure and forward it. Soon came the news of the battle of Friedland, and the unhappy father thought he read the fate of

his son in the face of every acquaintance he met. And so it was in later campaigns, as De Maistre records in correspondence that glows with tender and healthy solicitude. All this is worth dwelling upon, for two reasons. First, because he has been too much regarded and spoken of as a man of cold sensibility, and little moved by the hardships which fill the destiny of our unfortunate race. And, secondly, because his own keen acquaintance with mental anguish helps us to understand the zeal with which he attempts to reconcile the blind cruelty and pain and torture endured by mortals with the benignity and wisdom of the immortal. 'After all,' he used often to say, 'there are only two real evils—remorse and disease.' This is true enough for an apophthegm, but as a matter of fact it never for an instant dulled his sensibility to far less supreme forms of agony than the recollection of irreparable pain struck into the lives of others. It is interesting and suggestive to recall how a later publicist viewed the ills that dwarf our little lives. 'If I were asked to class human miseries,' said Tocqueville, 'I would do so in this order: first, Disease; second, Death; third, Doubt.' At a later date, he altered the order and deliberately declared doubt to be the most insupportable of all evils, worse than death itself. But Tocqueville was an aristocrat, as Guizot once told him, who accepted his defeat. He stood on the brink of the great torrent of democracy, and shivered. De Maistre was an aristocrat too, but he was incapable of knowing what doubt or hesitation meant. He never dreamt that his cause was lost, and he mocked and defied the Revolution to the end. We easily see how natures of this kind, ardent, impetuous, unflinching, find themselves in the triumphant paths that lead to remorse at their close, and how they thus come to feel remorse rather than doubt as the consummate agony of the human mind.

Having had this glimpse of De Maistre's character away from his books, we need not linger long over the remaining events of his life. In 1814 his wife and two daughters joined him in the Russian capital. Two years later an outburst of religious fanaticism caused the sudden expulsion of the Jesuits from Russia, to De Maistre's deep mortification. Several conversions had taken place from the orthodox to the Western faith, and these inflamed the orthodox party, headed by the Prince de Galitzin, the minister of public worship, with violent theological fury. De Maistre, whose intense attachment to his own creed was well known, fell under suspicion of having connived at these conversions, and the Emperor *himself* went so far as to question him. 'I told him,' De Maistre says, 'that I had never changed the faith of any of his subjects, but that if any of them had by chance made me a sharer of their confidence, neither honour nor conscience would have allowed me to tell them they were wrong.' This kind of dialogue between a sovereign and an ambassador implied a situation plainly unfavourable to effective diplomacy; the envoy obtained his recall, and after twenty-five years' absence returned to his native country (1817). On his way home, it may be noticed, De Maistre passed a few days in Paris, and thus, for the first and last time, one of the most eminent of modern French writers found himself on what was then French soil.

The king accorded De Maistre an honourable reception, conferred upon him a high office and distinguished rank and a small sum of money, and lent his ear to other counsellors. The philosopher, though insisting on declaring his political opinions, then, as ever, unwaveringly anti-revolutionary, threw himself mainly upon that literary composition which had been his solace in yet more evil days than these. It was at this time that he gave to the world the supreme fruit of nearly half

a century of study, meditation, and contact with the world, in *Du Pape*, *Les Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg*, and *L'Eglise Gallicane*. Their author did not live long to enjoy the vast discussion which they occasioned, nor the reputation they have since conferred upon his name. He died in February, 1821, after such a life as we have seen. We shall now examine the lessons which he drew as the sum of the mental experiences of this life.

II.

It is not at all surprising that they upon whom the revolutionary deluge came should have looked with indiscriminating horror and affright on all the influences which in their view had united first to gather up, and then to release the destructive flood. The eighteenth century, to men like De Maistre, seemed an infamous parenthesis, mysteriously interposed between the glorious age of Bossuet and Fénelon, and that yet brighter era for faith and the church which was still to come in the good time of divine providence. The philosophy of the last century, he says on more than one occasion, will form one of the most shameful epochs of the human mind: it never praised even good men except for what was bad in them. He looked upon the gods whom that century had worshipped as the direct authors of the bloodshed and ruin in which their epoch had closed; the memory of mild and humane philosophers was covered with the kind of black execration that prophets of old had hurled at Baal or Moloch; and Locke and Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau, were habitually spoken of as very scourges of God. From this temper two consequences naturally flowed. In the first place, while it lasted there was no hope of an honest philosophic discussion of the great questions which divide speculative minds. Modera-

tion and impartiality, for which French disputants have never at any time been remarkable, were virtues of almost superhuman difficulty for controversialists who had made up their minds that it was their opponents who had erected the guillotine, confiscated the sacred property of the church, slaughtered and banished her children, and filled the land with terror and confusion. It is hard amid the smoking ruins of the homestead to do full justice to the theoretical arguments of the supposed authors of the conflagration. Hence De Maistre, though, as has been already said, intimately acquainted with the works of his foes in the letter, was prevented by the vehemence of his antipathy to the effects which he attributed to them, from having any just critical estimate of their value and true spirit. 'I do not know one of these men,' he says of the philosophers of the eighteenth century, 'to whom the sacred title of honest man is quite suitable.' They are all wanting in probity. Their very names '*me déchirent la bouche.*' To admire Voltaire is the sign of a corrupt soul; and if anybody is drawn to the works of Voltaire, then be sure that God does not love such an one. The divine anathema is written on the very face of this arch-blasphemer; on his shameless brow, in the two extinct craters still sparkling with sensuality and hate, in that frightful *rictus* running from ear to ear, in those lips tightened by cruel malice, like a spring ready to fly back and launch forth blasphemy and sarcasm; he plunges into the mud, rolls in it, drinks of it; he surrenders his imagination to the enthusiasm of hell, which lends him all its forces; Paris crowned him, Sodom would have banished him.¹ Locke, again, did not understand himself. His distinguishing characteristics are feebleness and precipitancy of judgment. Vagueness and irresolution reign in his expressions as they do in his

(1) *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg* (8th edition, 1862), vol. i. pp. 238—242.

thoughts. He constantly exhibits that most decisive sign of mediocrity—he passes close by the greatest questions without perceiving them. ‘In the study of philosophy, contempt for Locke is the beginning of knowledge.’¹ Condillac was even more vigilantly than anybody else on his guard against his own conscience. But Hume was ‘perhaps the most dangerous and the most guilty of all those mournful writers who will for ever accuse the last century before posterity—the one who employed the most talent with the most coolness to do most harm.’² To Bacon De Maistre paid the compliment of composing a long refutation of his main ideas, in which Bacon’s folly, blindness, presumption, stupidity, profanity, and scientific charlatanry are denounced in vehement and often coarse terms, and treated as the natural outcome of a low morality.

It has long been the inglorious speciality of the theological school to insist in this way upon moral depravity as an antecedent condition of intellectual error. De Maistre in this respect was not unworthy of his fellows. He believed that his opponents were ‘even worse citizens than they were bad philosophers,’ and it was his horror of them in the former capacity, that made him so bitter and resentful against them in the latter. He could think of no more fitting image for opinions that he did not happen to believe than counterfeit money, ‘which is struck in the first instance by great criminals, and is afterwards passed by honest folk who perpetuate the crime without knowing what they do.’ A philosopher of the highest class, we may be sure, does not permit himself to be drawn down from the true object of his meditations by these sinister emotions. But De Maistre belonged emphatically to minds of the second order, whose eagerness to find truth is never intense and pure enough to raise them above perturbing antipathies to

(1) *Ibid.*, sixième entretien, i. 397—442.

(2) *Ibid.* p. 403.

persons. His whole attitude was fatal to his claim to be heard as a truth-seeker in any right sense of the term. He was not only persuaded of the general justice and inexpugnableness of the orthodox system, but he refused to believe that it was capable of being improved or supplemented by anything which a temperate and fair examination of other doctrines might peradventure be found to yield. With De Maistre there was no peradventure. Again, no speculative mind of the highest order ever mistakes, or ever moves systematically apart from, the main current of the social movement of its time. It is implied in the very definition of a thinker of supreme quality that he should detect, and be in a certain accord with, the most forward and central of the ruling tendencies of his epoch. Three-quarters of a century have elapsed since De Maistre was driven to attempt to explain the world to himself, and this interval has sufficed to show that the central conditions at that time for the permanent re-organisation of the society which had just been so violently rent in pieces, were assuredly not theological, military, nor ultramontane, but the very opposite of all these.

There was a second consequence of the conditions of the time. The catastrophe of Europe affected the matter as well as the manner of contemporary speculation. The French Revolution has become to us no more than a term, though the strangest term, in a historic series. To some of the best of those who were confronted on every side by its tumult and agitation, it was the prevailing of the gates of hell, the moral disruption of the universe, the absolute and total surrender of the world to them that plough iniquity and sow wickedness. Even under ordinary circumstances few men have gone through life without encountering some triumphant iniquity, some gross and prolonged cruelty, which makes them wonder how God should allow such things to be. If we remember the

aspect which the Revolution wore in the eyes of those who seeing it yet did not understand, we can imagine what dimensions this eternal enigma must have assumed in their sight. It was inevitable that the first problem to press on men with resistless urgency should be the ancient question of the method of the Creator's temporal government. What is the law of the distribution of good and evil fortune? How can we vindicate, with regard to the conditions of this life, the different destinies that fall to men? How can we defend the moral ordering of a world in which the wicked and godless constantly triumph, while the virtuous and upright who retain their integrity are as frequently buffeted and put to shame?

This tremendous question has never been presented with such sublimity of expression, such noble simplicity and force of thought, as in the majestic and touching legend of Job. But its completeness, as a presentation of the human tragedy, is impaired by the excessive prosperity which is finally supposed to reward the patient hero for his fortitude. Job received twice as much as he had before, and his latter end was blessed more than his beginning. In the chronicles of actual history men fare not so. There is a terribly logical finish about some of the dealings of fate, and in life the working of a curse is seldom stayed by any dramatic necessity for a smooth consummation. Destiny is no artist. The facts that confront us are relentless. No statement of the case is adequate which maintains, by ever so delicate an implication, that in the long run and somehow it is well in temporal things with the just, and ill with the unjust. Until we have firmly looked in the face the grim truth that temporal rewards and punishments do not follow the possession or the want of spiritual or moral virtue, so long we are still ignorant what that enigma is which speculative men, from the author of the book of Job downwards, have striven to resolve.

We can readily imagine the fulness with which the question would grow up in the mind of a royalist and Catholic exile at the end of the eighteenth century.

The common speech of the world on the subject involves an extraordinary kind of compromise. As De Maistre says, the generality of men seem to be persuaded of two contrary propositions. In familiar conversation we constantly hear how the success of such and such a merchant is owing to his probity, his exactness, his economy, which have procured for him universal esteem and confidence; or that God blesses this and this family because they are good people who have pity on the poor; no wonder that all goes well with them. On the other hand, there runs equally through our discourse an assumption of the exact opposite to this; of the triumph of audacity, fraud, and bad faith, and of the corresponding disappointment that eternally awaits ingenuous honesty. Witness 'the expression of a man of wit writing to a friend about a certain person of their acquaintance who had just obtained a distinguished post; *M—— was admirably fitted for this post in every respect, yet he has got it for all that.*' In the discourse of a single hour you shall hear the same man take it equally for granted, first, that cunning and unscrupulousness are certain of success in this world, and next that the virtuous man is certain to triumph in the long run.¹ De Maistre's explanation of this striking inconsistency in the popular mind is curiously maladroit. The entire universe, he says, obeys two forces; there are two men in each man. Go to the play, and will you find a single sublime trait of filial piety, conjugal love, even of religious devotion, of which the audience is not profoundly sensible, and which it will not drown in applause? Yet, go the next night, and you will hear just as much noise over the couplets of

(1) *Soirées*, 8ième entretien, i. 183—186.

Figaro. But granting that our sympathies are two-sided, and thus liable to be attracted almost equally by virtue and vice, now by the sublimest and now by the least sublime sentiments, how does this bear on the familiar inconsistency of our two proverbial beliefs about the temporal destiny which the virtuous man may expect? When the cynical Preacher declared that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked, again there be wicked men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous, he was not avowing sympathy, but recording a result of his observation of life. The simple truth is that such observation discloses to us two sets of instances. We see virtuous men loaded with temporal prosperity, and with a natural enthusiasm we hasten to establish a general law on their merited good fortune.¹ Then we cannot help seeing examples of craft, and wickedness, and violence, just as amply loaded with temporal advantages; and on these also we build

(1) It is one of the weaknesses of untrained minds not to be able to stop at such generalisations. After they have reached them by process of observation, they are by-and-by so misled by a confused idea that these general records of facts are *laws*, as to import into them legal ideas of invincible necessity, of obligation, and so forth. Thus, that 'The man of blood shall not live out half his days,' is very likely to be true as a register of fact, because the man of blood naturally surrounds himself with dangerous physical conditions, but there is no pronouncement of a necessary moral doom in such a generalisation. Let us take a more striking instance of confusion, which has played a curious and remarkable part in European history. When a sovereign or great feudal potentate remonstrated with parsimonious burghers, he charged them with scandalous disobedience to the declared will of God, whose prophet had told the Israelites concerning the king whom they sought,—'He will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots and to be his horsemen; and he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers; he will take the tenth of your sheep, and ye shall be his servants.' Samuel was warning the people of the usual temper and dealings of kings with their subjects, as a matter of fact; the feudal potentate of the fifteenth century borrowed his words to be the divine sanction of lordly prerogatives, as matters of moral and indefeasible right.

a generalisation about the course of human affairs. Each generalisation is exactly as true to fact as the other, and therefore each in the end neutralises the other; thus showing the cardinal truth that prosperity comes of compliance with the conditions requisite for obtaining it, and that of these conditions virtue sometimes is and sometimes is not one.

It was De Maistre's fondness for dwelling on the two natures within the human breast, that led him away from this simplest and most obviously intelligible explanation of the popular contradiction. For his own way of dealing with the main subject, to which we shall now proceed, rests wholly on the base implied in this explanation. He exhibits, indeed, some of the inevitable inconsistency of the theological philosopher, in an occasional appeal as by a side-wind to any stray superstition, even while professing to beat mere reasoners on their own grounds and fighting with their own weapons. Now and again, he shifts the question back into positions which are supposed to be abandoned before the controversy can really begin. For example, in one place he compares God to a temporal ruler, who in the siege of a hostile town cannot always be sure of sparing innocent persons. 'No,' aptly interrupts one of the interlocutors; 'but why should not this good prince take under his protection the loyal inhabitants of this town, and transport them to some happy province where they may be rewarded for their fidelity?' Well, this is just what God does when innocent beings perish in a general catastrophe, De Maistre replies, referring evidently to the rewards that await the just in the next world. For one thing, this rather reminds one of the fanatical priest who implored a victorious captain to put to death every one of the inhabitants of a certain place, whether orthodox or heretical; '*Dieu saura reconnaître les siens.*' In De Maistre's case, such a position

involved not only an indirect justification of inhumanity, but a *petitio principii* as well. The discussion which it is the professed work of his book to conduct, is only possible on condition that its field is confined to the rewards and punishments of this world. It is just, however, to De Maistre to say that there are few writers on his side who are so free from the detestable logical sin of pretending to argue on grounds and principles of reason, when in reality they postulate the acceptance of all the dicta of authority; who when the scale is turning against them with reference to the rewards and pains of time, achieve an imitation of victory by clandestinely slipping eternity into the dish.

Nothing can be more clearly put than De Maistre's answers to the question which the circumstances of the time placed before him to solve. What is the law of the distribution of good and evil fortune in this life? Is it a moral law? Do prosperity and adversity fall respectively to the just and the unjust, either individually or collectively? Has the ancient covenant been faithfully kept, that whoso hearkens diligently to the divine voice, and observes all the commandments to do them, shall be blessed in his basket and his store and in all the work of his hand? Or is God a God that hideth himself? Writers on natural theology have, as a rule, taken care to restrict their vision and discourse exclusively to those circumstances in the order of the world, which seem to imply the controlling watchfulness of perfect benevolence and unvarying tenderness towards all created things. They see only the steady recurrence of the seasons, the rich fruitfulness of the earth, the fitness of the human organisation for the circumstances in which it is placed, the helpfulness of the humbler organisations that are man's ministers, and all the glorious ideas and apprehensions that are implanted in his nature.

They invite the pious gratitude of men for the sunshine, but say nothing of the hurricane. All that is black and mischievous alike in the external world and in human nature they are wont to ignore, or else to solve by the arbitrary invention of a second deity, the devil. One is all benevolence, while the other is made up of malignity, and the benign government of the universe is satisfactorily asserted by the attribution of all good things to the one, and of all evil to the malice of the other,—a malice as entirely unaccountable as it is fatal.

De Maistre did not resort to this grotesque explanation of the disasters which come upon men. He did not account for the occasional triumph of the wicked, and the occasional depression of the righteous, by the hypothesis that there is a division of the patronage of the universe between two contending powers. To ask that temporal rewards and punishments should follow respectively virtue and wickedness, he held most wisely to imply a fundamental misconception of the conditions of the divine government. 'We do not wonder,' he says, 'that in a battle the cannon-ball hits the righteous man as well as the wicked, or even spares the wicked while it destroys the righteous. There is no more reason why we should be surprised that misfortunes sometimes appear to single out the just, and to pass by on the other side in the case of the unjust.' The true question which the impugnors of the divine government habitually misstate, is whether a bad man is sometimes seen to be exempt from calamity because he is bad, and the good man stricken by it because he is good. If this were the fact, that the good man suffered for being good, and the bad man triumphed for being bad, then the moral problem would be insoluble. There is a confusion between two questions:—Why does the just man suffer? and Why does man suffer? When evil overtakes the righteous, it is not in their quality of

righteous, but in their quality of men. Every human being in his quality of man is subject to all the misfortunes to which humanity is liable. 'To say that crime is happy in this world, and innocence unhappy, is a thorough contradiction in terms; it is just like saying that poverty is rich and opulence is poor. But this shows the perversity of man. It is not enough that God should have attached unspeakable happiness to the exercise of virtue; it is not enough that he should have promised to this the greatest share beyond all comparison in the general distribution of the good things of this world; these infatuated people, *dont le raisonnement a banni la raison*, refuse to be satisfied. It is absolutely necessary that their imaginary Just Man should be beyond suffering; that no ill should ever befall him; that the rain should not wet him; that the mildew should respectfully stop short at the boundaries of his field; and that if he should perchance forget to bar his door, then God should be under the obligation of sending an angel with a flaming sword, lest some *fortunate* robber should come and carry off the gold and pretty things of the Just.'¹ Justice in the husbandman has nothing to do with the copiousness of the yield of his land. If his yield is inferior to the supply of the wicked husbandman, it is because certain general laws regulate agricultural things; and so long as there is no special and particular interruption of them for the benefit of the bad, nor to the detriment of the good, then the good have no rightful grounds of complaint against the ruler of the universe.

So far it will be seen that De Maistre is strictly in the path that leads to the root of the entire matter. If he had followed it as steadily to the end, he must have come to the positive solution. But this he had no intention of doing, and the admirable vigour with which he began to confront the question,

(1) *Soirées*, 3ième entretien, i. 212.

and to pursue a solution which it perhaps demands some fortitude to accept, first begins to waver, and then swiftly changing face, carries him to one of the most terrible theological suppositions that have ever been propounded. His main position is plain. Material prosperity, all outward good fortune, is acquired and retained by certain means; it follows certain conditions which very often do not lie in the moral order at all. We shall see presently to what extent and in what sense moral conditions enter into even external success and comfort. Meanwhile it is clear that De Maistre admits that there is no necessary connection, and holds it to be no disparagement of the divine method of governing the world, that there should not be this necessary connection, between success and virtue. Instead, however, of consistently adhering to this, and explaining it as he well might, without weakening his hold of theistic principle, he instantly sets to work to soften down his position and make it contribute as little as possible to the permanent elucidation of the difficulty. It is true that he always keeps away from what he justly stigmatizes as 'the mad hypothesis of optimism;' but he shrinks, perhaps involuntarily, from the only really tenable theory in its complete and logical form. After all, he asks, what is virtue? 'Strip our miserable virtues of all that we owe to temperament, to sense of honour, to opinion, to pride, to want of power, to opportunity or circumstance; what is left?' This, it will be observed, is in the well-known theological vein, which vindicates providence at the cost of mankind, and exalts the divine clemency and justice by lowering the level of human dignity. Necessarians are unjustly reproached with robbing man of all credit or discredit for the way in which he exercises his will; to deny the freedom of the will, it is said, is to rob virtue of all merit, and therefore of all claim to praise. Yet the persons who especially resort to this

kind of talk, seldom speak of our virtues except as miserable rags, just as De Maistre does here. Even if we concede that virtue is but a sorry possession at the very best, it is still undeniable that some men have more of it than others; and the thesis is that external prosperity distributes itself, upon the whole, without exact relation or proportion to virtuous quality. De Maistre believed this, yet could not refrain from a return upon insinuations which really neutralise and stultify his deliberate position.

Let us take another instance of this half reluctance to accept a truth which his reasoned observation imposes. Although his whole argument professes to be a solution of the fact which he does not deny, that virtue does not appear to bring any outward good thing to the persons who practise it, yet he more than once dwells upon the long life which holy persons have often enjoyed; and he quotes with exultation Voltaire's recognition of the length of days which the saints of old in their religious solitude constantly attained. De Maistre was much too acute, however, seriously to rest on an argument which might prove that Voltaire was a more righteous person than St. Paul. There is one more example of his lurking desire to be able to point out the temporal advantage of virtue, which is too quaint to be passed over. There are some diseases, he says, of a special and peculiar character, like phthisis, dropsy, apoplexy; while there are others which can only be described by general names, as *malaises, incommodités, douleurs, fièvres innommées*. 'Now'—and this is the astounding part of the passage—'the more virtuous a man is, the more sheltered he is against *diseases that have names*.' What can be more monstrous than thus to make a purely artificial division of diseases, and then to hang a sort of apology for divine providence upon it? As if good men seldom died of Bright's disease of the kidneys. Why not say that the

more virtuous a man is, the more sheltered he is against Eustachian tubes or Malpighian capsules?

This curious attempt, to connect diseases that have special names with moral offences is the more remarkable because he has expressly said, in his most striking manner, that the mode of a man's death is indifferent to the Supreme Being. 'If it is decided,' he says in one place, 'that a certain number of children must die, I do not see what difference it makes to them whether they die in one way or another. Whether a dagger pierces a man's heart, or a little blood collects in his brain, he falls dead equally; but in the first case we say that he has ended his days by a violent death. *For God, however, there is no such thing as violent death.* A steel blade fixed in the heart is a malady, just like a simple callosity that we should call a polypus.'¹ For the innocent children who were crushed to death beneath the falling houses at the earthquake of Lisbon, what mattered it before God, whether they came to an end in this way, or by scarlatina, epilepsy, and difficult teething? Whether three or four thousand perish spread over a great space, or all at once and at a blow by an earthquake or a rising of the sea, is the same thing for the reason, though it makes an enormous difference for the imagination.

This brings us to the most characteristic part of De Maistre's speculations on this subject. He perceived that the optimistic conception of the deity as benign, merciful, infinitely forgiving, was very far indeed from covering the facts. So he insisted on seeing in human destiny the ever-present hand of a stern and terrible judge, administering a Draconian code with blind and pitiless severity. God created men under conditions which left them free to choose between good and evil. All the physical evil that exists in the world is a penalty for the moral evil that

(1) *Soirées*, 4ième entretien, i. 263.

has resulted from the abuse by men of this freedom of choice. For these physical calamities God is only responsible, in the way in which a criminal judge is responsible for a hanging. Men cannot blame the judge for the gallows; the fault is their own in committing those offences for which hanging is prescribed beforehand as the penalty. These curses which dominate human life are not the result of the cruelty of the divine ruler, but of the folly and wickedness of mankind, who seeing the better course, yet deliberately choose the worse. The order of the world is overthrown by the iniquities of men; it is we who have provoked the exercise of the divine justice, and called down the tokens of his vengeance. The misery and disaster that surround us like a cloak, are the penalty of our crimes and the price of our expiation. As the divine St. Thomas has said, *Deus est auctor mali quod est pœna, non autem mali quod est culpa.* There is a certain quantity of wrong done over the face of the world; therefore the great Judge exacts a proportionate quantity of punishment. The total amount of evil suffered makes nice equation with the total amount of evil done; the extent of human suffering tallies precisely with the extent of human guilt. Of course you must take original sin into account, 'which explains all, and without which you can explain nothing.' 'In virtue of this primitive degradation we are subject to all sorts of physical sufferings *in general*; just as in virtue of this same degradation we are subject to all sorts of vices *in general*. This original malady therefore [which is the correlative of original sin] has no other name. It is only the capacity of suffering all evils, as original sin is only the capacity of committing all crimes.'¹ Hence all calamity is either the punishment of sins actually committed by the sufferers, or else is the general penalty exacted for general sinfulness.

(1) *Soirées*, i. 76.

Sometimes an innocent being is stricken, and a guilty being appears to escape. But is it not the same in the transactions of earthly tribunals? And yet we do not say that they are conducted without regard to justice and righteousness. 'When God punishes any society for the crimes that it has committed, he does justice as we do justice ourselves in these sorts of circumstance. A city revolts; it massacres the representatives of the sovereign; it shuts its gates against him; it defends itself against his arms; it is taken. The prince has it dismantled and deprived of all its privileges; nobody will find fault with this decision on the ground that there are innocent persons shut up in the city.' ¹

The reader will observe the following points in this marvelous theory:—

1. That De Maistre's deity is a colossal Septembriseur, a veritable Marat enthroned high in the peaceful heavens, demanding ever-renewed holocausts of blood in the name of divine justice, exactly as the Terrorists cried for holocausts in the name of the public safety. 'Give me,' cried the Friend of the People, 'the lives of ten, twenty, thirty, three hundred thousand, ci-devants and aristocrats, and the state will be saved. The foundation of the commonwealth can only be cemented by

(1) De Maistre found a curiously characteristic kind of support for this view in the fact that evils are called *flaux*: flails are things to beat with: so evils must be things with which men are beaten; and as we should not be beaten if we did not deserve it, *argal*, suffering is a merited punishment. Apart from that common infirmity which leads people after they have discovered an analogy between two things, to argue from the properties of the one to those of the other, as if, instead of being analogous, they were identical, De Maistre was particularly fond of inferring moral truths from etymologies. He has an argument for the deterioration of man, drawn from the fact that the Romans expressed in the same word, *supplicium*, the two ideas of prayer and punishment (*Soirées*, 2ième entretien, i. p. 108). His profundity as an etymologist may be gathered from his analysis of *cadaver*: *ca-ro, da-ta, ver-mibus*. There are many others of the same quality.

their blood, which has peculiar virtue in it. You say hundreds of them, women and youths, have done no harm ; has not their order done harm ?' Just so, the being to whom De Maistre ascribed the government of the universe is supposed on his theory to cry out for an uninterrupted supply of human misery and destruction. It may seem odd that De Maistre should have invited our reverence and love for such a conception ; he lived, however, in times when the Parisians had begun to invest even *mère Guillotine* with endearing associations.

2. It is true, as a general rule of the human mind, that the objects which men have worshipped have improved in morality and wisdom as men themselves have improved, and that the quiet gods, without effort of their own, have grown holier and purer by the agitations and toil which civilise their worshippers ; in other words, that the same influences which elevate and widen our sense of human duty, also give corresponding height and nobleness to our ideas of the divine character. The history of the civilisation of the earth is the history of the civilisation of Olympus also. It will be seen that the deity whom De Maistre sets up is below the moral level of the time in respect of Punishment. In intellectual matters he vehemently proclaimed the superiority of the tenth or the twelfth over the eighteenth century, but it is surely carrying admiration for those loyal times indecently far to seek in the vindictive sackings of revolted towns, and the miscellaneous butcheries of men, women, and babes, which then marked the vengeance of outraged sovereignty, the most apt parallel and analogy for the systematic administration of human society by its creator. It is open to a man with De Maistre's convictions to say to the state, 'The man whom you have just hung for murder was born and bred up amidst associations of violence, lawlessness, disregard of life, and absolute mental

darkness: is not the punishment of such an offender a visitation of the sins of the fathers on the children, and an act therefore of the same kind of injustice which you charge against the divine government?' This would have been a pertinent thing to say once, when penalties were inflicted vindictively and retributively. But the retributive theory is no longer held by enlightened minds. We value punishment as a deterrent and reforming agency, and as that only. Now the mass of general evil which has been visited upon men, and which still confronts them with hardly diminishing volume as a punishment for the general degradation by original sin, cannot be deterrent, because the sin has been committed long ago, and can neither be undone nor repeated. Therefore what is it but vindictive and retributive castigation, inflicted without any view to prevent the repetition of the offence, since it cannot be repeated? This is an idea which few enlightened men now hold. Such punishment can no longer be regarded as moral in any deep or permanent sense; it implies a gross, harsh, and revengeful character in the executioner, that is eminently perplexing and incredible to those who expect to find an idea of justice in the government of the world, at least not materially below that attained in the clumsy efforts of uninspired publicists.

3. In mere point of administration, the criminal code which De Maistre put into the hands of the Supreme Being works in a more arbitrary and capricious manner than any device of an Italian Bourbon. As Voltaire asks,—

*Lisbonne, qui n'est plus, eut-elle plus des vices
Que Londres, que Paris, plongés dans les délices?
Lisbonne est abîmée, et l'on danse à Paris.*

Stay, De Maistre replies, look at Paris thirty years later, not dancing, but red with blood. This kind of thing is often said, even now; but it is really time to abandon the prostitu-

tion of the name of Justice to a process which brings Louis xvi. to the block and consigns De Maistre to poverty and exile, because Louis xiv., the Regent, and Louis xv., had been profligate men and injudicious rulers. The reader may remember how the unhappy Emperor Maurice as his five innocent sons were in turn murdered before his eyes, at each stroke piously ejaculated, 'Thou art just, O Lord! and thy judgments are righteous.'¹ Any name would befit this kind of transaction better than that which, in the dealings of men with one another at least, we reserve for the honourable anxiety that he should reap who has sown, that the reward should be to him who has toiled for it, and the pain to him who has deliberately incurred it. What is gained by attributing to the divine government a method tainted with every quality that could vitiate the enactment of penalties by a temporal sovereign?

4. Though De Maistre holds that the scheme of faith is in truth the best friend and harmoniser of reason, he rests the entire superstructure of the divine government upon what he calls the original degradation of man. On this *prévarication*, which exhibits itself in our language, thought, conduct, method, he is never weary of expatiating; yet he never once explains, or even attempts to explain, in precise and intelligible language, what this original sin was, which weighs so mightily on the children of earth. It is avowedly a mystery. Nobody who has asked himself fruitless questions—why the race of man inhabits the earth, or what is the final upshot of the endless series of successive transfusions among forms of life and growth—is likely to deny that outside the ever-widening circle within which reason reigns and works there lies the darkened and sterile land of mystery eternally unfathomable. But this

(1) *Gibbon*, c. xlii. vol. v. 385.

general recognition of the inscrutability of final causes is an entirely different process from the assertion of any one special, particular, and defined mystery, to be received as the foundation-stone of a system claiming to be rational in every other part but its foundation-stone.

How long will men of all creeds, Ultramontanes, Anglicans, Presbyterians, continue to pretend to take a stand on reason, when they are forced to admit that you must believe on the very threshold that something once happened of which they can give you no details, of which there is no shred of authentic record, unless conflicting myths of early races constitute an authentic record, and which has all the air of an artificial invention devised in primitive times, when men's conceptions of a deity were of a gross and simple kind, for the purpose of explaining human suffering? Even if we had a record of the fall of men from the estate of demi-gods, nobody either before or since De Maistre has attempted rationally—and they pretend to be working with rational instruments—to explain what ought to be their major premiss, that suffering is expiatory of sin. Why and how does misery *purge* degradation? What is this expiatory process? How does the exaction of a fine from a drunkard purge his offence morally? If the apologists would all courageously say, as some of them have done, that these things are mysteries, things absolutely unintelligible, and therefore are true, good; but if they are honest in believing their reconcilableness with reason, then they are bound, at all events, to admit these questions fully into their meditations. De Maistre saw the necessity for some elucidation of the nature of punishment, sacrifice, purification, and the like, when he wrote that most extraordinary of all his pieces, the *Éclaircissement sur les Sacrifices*. The manner of his elucidation will be sufficiently visible when we

say that it turns upon some mysterious qualities which he believed to exist in the blood, and that he supports it, among other arguments of about the same calibre, by two strange allegations: that the happiest changes in nations have almost invariably been brought about by bloody catastrophes, and that the families which endure longest are those which have lost most members in war. One can understand the curious fascination which the character of the public executioner always exercised over De Maistre's mind.¹ He was nothing less than a mysterious high-priest of society, and the type, as we have already seen, of the supreme government of the whole earth.

5. De Maistre's explanation of pain and misery is equally open with all others which issue from the same laboratory, to the objection of failing to satisfy that sense which the progress of scientific knowledge is every day intensifying, of the kinship of all sentient beings. The pleasure and pain of brutes are in some aspects identical with, and where they are not identical are closely analogous to, the same sentiments in men. We desire some community of explanation where there is such community of circumstance. What is the law of the distribution of pleasure and pain among these humbler creatures? Has there been original sin here too? Did some fabled ancestor of elephant or oyster inflict a curse upon his descendants? All through animated creation we behold pain and disaster. When a weasel throttles a rabbit, we explain the fact by reference to the great principle of the conditions of existence. When a shark crushes the bones of a man who has fallen overboard, we are to attribute the wretch's fate to heaven's judgment, by supposing either that he had sinned specially, or that his

(1) The elaborate picture of the Executioner in the *Soirées de St. Pétersbourg* (i. p. 39) is very striking.

bloody end was a trifling instalment of the fine inflicted on the race for having sinned generally. Would it not be simpler and more rational to explain all the pain as well as all the happiness of all creatures with organisations capable of perceiving the difference between the two states, by reference to a single principle? This principle we have in the conditions of existence. De Maistre appears to have been on the verge of recognising the adequateness of this, as we have already noticed. But the ingenuity of men who have resolved to move in the theological groove is inexhaustible in finding artificial reasons why they should remain in it.

Finally, De Maistre was prevented by the methods of his time from examining in the only effective way possible those questions of the origin and nature of Justice, which in truth are the key to all fertile speculations on the government of the universe. He never thought of morality in connection with growth and development. It represented to him some entity, absolute and rigid, established and promulgated once for all. Now philosophic history shows that Justice is the social idea in its highest, widest, and most binding expression; and, therefore, that its form and precepts vary with the variations in the general conditions of communities. It signifies the moral principle which obliges each so to shape his conduct and relations, his claims and his achievements, that they harmonise with the highest good of all. The same account would apply to Virtue, spoken of generally. Justice or virtue, therefore, being thus only means to the universal weal, of which material prosperity and strength are elements, it flows from the definition, that provided the moral sentiment of a community is enlightened by a correct intellectual appreciation of the circumstances amid which its movement is, material goods will come to it in proportion to its love of justice and virtue, and

the average amount of conformity to the particular precepts in which they are specialised. To this extent it is perfectly true that justice is likely under certain conditions to conduce to external prosperity and security. For example, in the case where De Maistre asks whether we expect God to send down an angel to guard against the robber the doors of the just man who has not taken the precaution to bolt them, he really misses what might have been said in favour of his own suppressed half belief that after all it *is* well with the just even externally; because in communities where property happens to be an institution, respect for it in the individual case is one of the components of a just character, so that by setting an example of justice in his own person, our honest man on whose behalf God refuses to send an angel, is in fact adopting the best means open to him, beyond bolts and bars, of securing his gold and precious things. Beyond and outside of this, there is only one certain result of virtue in a man.

No good is certain, but the steadfast mind,
The undivided will to seek the good.

De Maistre's ideas upon Prayer fit in rather oddly with his theories of the chastising judge, and of the sufferings which overtake all men in their quality of human beings; and he exhibits the inconsistencies on this subject common to men who come near to the positive stand-point, while still holding tight as with one hand to theological hypotheses. God, he says, is not responsible for evil, because it is a punishment for sin, which you may avoid first by forbearing from sinful acts (one would like to know how he reconciled this with his notions about original sin), and next by prayer. He vindicates prayer in the first instance by the usual sarcastic onslaught upon the conception of eternal and immovable laws, as if, says he, there

were no such things as secondary laws, by which an almighty being could interfere to accomplish the objects of devout solicitation. But in his discourse on this subject the atmosphere of law very soon becomes too oppressive, and he is not long in throwing himself back upon 'the secrets of the spiritual world.' Beginning by resting on prayer as a really controlling objective agency, he comes at last by a silent but judicious transition to place it among the almost exclusively subjective influences. At first we find prayer held out as a means of tempering and even wholly averting external disaster; but by-and-by we learn that its purifying virtue, its subjective efficacy, in other words, is infinitely more valuable than anything that we can ask in our miserable ignorance. Just as in his former enterprise to show that some temporal reward falls to virtue, he winds up by showing that virtue is filthy rags and deserves no reward at all; so here, while starting from the point that prayer modifies the heavenly judgments and stays the divine hand, being encountered on his argumentative way by the objection that prayer does not often succeed in effecting this modification, he indignantly assails the supplicants: *Aveugles et insensés que nous sommes ! au lieu de nous plaindre de n'être pas exaucés, tremblons plutôt d'avoir mal demandé, ou d'avoir demandé le mal.* It is quite true, he holds, that the prayers of a nation are heard, only let us be sure that we know first what is a nation, and second that we know what is true prayer. The more you examine the thing, he says in one place, the more convinced you will be that there is nothing so difficult in the whole world as to utter a genuine prayer. It is thus that the hopes of men are ever mocked; the officious theologian proffers us a fair and stout support along the stony roadways, and ere we have well grasped it he shreds it all away in sophistical explanations.

It will be inferred from De Maistre's general position that he was no friend to physical science. Just as moderns see in the advance of the methods and boundaries of physical knowledge the most direct and sure means of displacing the unfruitful subjective methods of old, and so of renovating the entire field of human thought and activity, so did De Maistre see, as his school has seen since, that here was the stronghold of those whom he held foes. 'Ah, how dearly,' he exclaimed, 'has man paid for the natural sciences!' Not but that providence designed that man should know something about them; only it must be in due order. The ancients were not permitted to attain to much or even any sound knowledge of physics, indisputably above us as they were in force of mind, a fact shown by the superiority of their languages, which ought to silence for ever the voice of our modern pride. Why did the ancients remain so ignorant of natural science? Because they were not Christian. 'When all Europe was Christian, when the priests were the universal teachers, when all the establishments of Europe were Christianised, when theology had taken its place at the head of all instruction, and the other faculties were ranged around her like maids of honour round their queen, the human race being thus prepared, then the natural sciences were given to it.' Science must be kept in its place, for it resembles fire which, when confined in the grates prepared for it, is the most useful and powerful of man's servants; scattered about anyhow, it is the most terrible of scourges. Whence the marked supremacy of the seventeenth century, especially in France? From the happy accord of religion, science, and chivalry, and from the supremacy conceded to the first. The more perfect theology is in a country, the more fruitful it is in true science; and that is why Christian nations have surpassed all others in the sciences,

and why the Indians and Chinese will never reach us, so long as we remain respectively as we are. The more theology is cultivated, honoured, and supreme, then, other things being equal, the more perfect will human science be: that is to say, it will have the greater force and expansion, and will be the more free from every mischievous and perilous connection.¹

Little would be gained here by serious criticism of a view of this kind from a positive point. How little, the reader will understand from De Maistre's own explanation of his principles of proof and evidence. 'They have called to witness against Moses,' he says, 'history, chronology, astronomy, geology, &c. The objections have disappeared before true science; but those were profoundly wise who despised them before any inquiry, or who only examined them in order to discover a refutation, but without ever doubting that there was one. Even a mathematical objection ought to be despised, for though it may be a demonstrated truth, still you will never be able to demonstrate that it contradicts a truth that has been demonstrated before.' His final formula he boldly announced in these words:—'*Que toutes les fois qu'une proposition sera prouvée par le genre de preuve qui lui appartient, l'objection quelconque, MÊME INSOLUBLE, ne doit plus être écoutée.*' Suppose, for example, that by a consensus of testimony it were perfectly proved that Archimedes set fire to the fleet of Marcellus by a burning-glass; then all the objections of geometry disappear. Prove if you can, and if you choose, that by certain laws a glass to be capable of setting fire to the Roman fleet must have been as big as the whole city of Syracuse, and ask me what answer I have to make to that. '*J'ai à vous répondre qu'Archimède brûla la flotte romaine avec un miroir ardent.*'

The interesting thing about such opinions as these, is not

(1). See the *Examen de la Philosophie de Bacon*, vol. ii. 58 seq.

the exact height and depth of their falseness, but the considerations which could recommend them to a man of so much knowledge, both of books and of the outer facts of life, and of so much natural acuteness as De Maistre. Persons who have accustomed themselves to ascertained methods of proof, are apt to look on a man who vows that if a thing has been declared true by some authority whom he respects, then that constitutes proof to him, as either the victim of a preposterous and barely credible infatuation, or else as a flat impostor. Yet he was no ignorant monk. He had no selfish or official interest in taking away the keys of knowledge, entering not in himself, and them that would enter in hindering. The true reasons for his detestation of the eighteenth-century philosophers, science, and literature, are simple enough. Like every wise man, he felt that the end of all philosophy and science is emphatically social, the construction and maintenance and improvement of a fabric under which the communities of men may find shelter, and all the other conditions for living their lives with dignity and service. Then he held that no truth can be harmful to society; if he found any system of opinions, any given attitude of the mind, injurious to tranquillity and the public order, he instantly concluded that, however plausible they might seem when tested by logic and demonstration, they were fundamentally untrue and deceptive. What is logic compared with eternal salvation in the next world, and the practice of virtue in this? The recommendation of such a mind as De Maistre's is the intensity of its appreciation of order and social happiness. The obvious weakness of such a mind and the curse inherent in its influence, is that it overlooks the prime condition of all; that social order can never be established on a durable basis so long as the discoveries of scientific truth in all its departments are suppressed, or incorrectly appreciated, or socially misapplied.

De Maistre did not perceive that the cause which he supported was no longer the cause of peace and tranquillity and right living, but was in a state of absolute and final decomposition, and therefore was the cause of disorder and blind wrong living. Of this we shall now see more.

III.

When the waters of the deluge of '89 began to assuage, the best minds soon satisfied themselves that the event which Bonaparte's restoration of order enabled them to look back upon with a certain tranquillity and a certain completeness, had been neither more nor less than a new irruption of barbarians into the European world. The monarchy, the nobles, and the church, with all the ideas that gave each of them life and power, had fallen before atheists and Jacobins, as the ancient empire of Rome had fallen before Huns and Goths, Vandals and Lombards. The leaders of the revolution had succeeded one another, as Attila had come after Alaric, and as Genseric had been followed by Odoacer. The problem which presented itself was not new in the history of western civilisation; the same dissolution of old bonds which perplexed the foremost men at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had distracted their predecessors from the fifth to the eighth, though their conditions and circumstances were widely different. The practical question in both cases was just the same—how to establish a stable social order which, resting on principles that should command the assent of all, might secure the co-operation of all for its harmonious and efficient maintenance, and might offer a firm basis for the highest and best life that the moral and intellectual state of the time allowed. There were two courses open, or which seemed to be open, in this gigantic enterprise of reconstructing a society. One of them was to treat the case of

the eighteenth century as if it were not merely similar to, but identical with, the case of the fifth, and as if exactly the same forces which had knit western Europe together into a compact civilisation a thousand years before, would again suffice for a second consolidation. Christianity, rising with the zeal and strength of youth out of the ruins of the Empire, and feudalism by the need of self-preservation imposing a form upon the unshapen associations of the barbarians, had between them compacted the foundations and reared the fabric of mediæval life. Why, many men asked themselves, should not Christian and feudal ideas repeat their great achievement, and be the means of re-organising the system which a blind rebellion against them had thrown into deplorable and fatal confusion? Let the century which had come to such an end be regarded as a mysteriously intercalated episode, and no more, in the long drama of faith and sovereign order; or, as a sombre and pestilent stream, whose fountains no man should discover, whose waters had for a season mingled with the mightier current of the divinely allotted destiny of the race, and had then gathered themselves apart and flowed off, to end as they had begun, in the stagnation and barrenness of the desert. Philosophers and men of letters, astronomers and chemists, atheists and republicans, had shown that they were only powerful to destroy, as the Goths and Vandals had been, and that they were impotent, as the Goths and Vandals had been, in building up again. Let men turn their faces, then, once more to that system by which, in the ancient times, Europe had been delivered from a relapse into eternal night.

The second course was very different from this, as the minds to whom it commended itself were cast in a different mould and drew their inspiration from other traditions. In their view the system which the church had been the main agency in organ-

ising, had fallen quite as much from its own irremediable weakness as from the direct onslaughts of assailants within and without. The barbarians had rushed in, it was true, in 1793; but this time it was the church and feudalism which were in the position of the old empire on whose ruins they had built. What had once restored order and belief to the West, were now in their own turn overtaken by decay and dissolution. To look to them to unite these new barbarians in a stable and vigorous civilisation, because they had organised Europe of old, was as infatuated as it would have been to expect the later emperors to equal the exploits of the Republic and their greatest predecessors in the purple. To despise philosophers and men of science was only to play over again in a new dress the very part which Julian had enacted in the face of nascent Christianity. The eighteenth century, instead of being that home of malaria which the Catholic and Royalist party represented, was in truth the seed-ground of a new and better future; its ideas were to furnish the material and the implements by which should be repaired the terrible breaches and chasms in European order that had been made alike by despots and Jacobins, by priests and atheists, by aristocrats and sans-culottes; amidst all the demolition upon which its leading minds had been so zealously bent, they had been animated by the warmest love of social justice, of human freedom, of equal rights, and by the most fervent and sincere longing to make a nobler happiness more universally attainable by all the children of men. It was to these great principles that we ought eagerly to turn, to liberty, to equality, to brotherhood, if we wished to achieve before the new invaders a work of civilisation and social reconstruction, such as Catholicism and feudalism had achieved for the multitudinous invaders of old.

Such was the difference which divided opinion when men

took heart to survey the appalling scene of moral desolation that the cataclysm of '93 had left behind. We may admire the courage of either school ; for if the conscience of the Liberals was oppressed by the sanguinary tragedy in which freedom and brotherhood and justice had been consummated, the Catholic and the Royalist were just as sorely burdened with the weight of kingly basenesses and priestly crimes and hypocrisies. If the one had some difficulty in interpreting Jacobinism and the Terror, the other was still more severely pressed to interpret the fact and origin and meaning of the Revolution ; if the Liberal had Marat and Hébert, the Royalist had Louis xv., and the Catholic had Dubois and De Rohan. Each school could intrepidly hurl back the taunts of its enemy, and neither of them did full justice to the strong side of the other. Yet we who are, in England at all events, removed a little aside from the centre of this great battle, may perceive that at that time both of the contending hosts fought under honourable banners, and could inscribe upon their shields a rational and intelligible device. Indeed, unless the modern Liberal admits the strength inherent in the cause of his enemies, it is impossible for him to explain to himself the duration and obstinacy of the conflict, the slow advance and occasional repulse of the host in which he has enlisted, and the tardy progress that Liberalism has made in that stupendous reconstruction which the Revolution has forced the modern political thinker to meditate upon, and the modern statesman to promote and control.

De Maistre, from those general ideas as to the method of the government of the world, of which we have already seen something, had formed what he conceived to be a perfectly satisfactory way of accounting for the eighteenth century and its terrific climax. The will of man is left free ; he acts contrary to the will of God ; and then God exacts the shedding

of blood as the penalty. So much for the past. The only hope of the future lay in an immediate return to the system which God himself had established, and in the restoration of that spiritual power which had presided over the reconstruction of Europe in darker and more chaotic times than even these. Though, perhaps, he nowhere expresses himself on this point in a distinct formula, De Maistre was firmly impressed with the idea of historic unity and continuity. He looked upon the history of the West in its integrity, and was entirely free from anything like that disastrous kind of misconception which makes the English Protestant treat the long period between St. Paul and Martin Luther as a howling waste, or which makes the American republican contemptuously omit from all account the still longer period of human effort from the crucifixion of Christ to the Declaration of Independence. The rise of the vast structure of western civilisation during and after the dissolution of the Empire, presented itself to his mind as a single and uniform process, though marked in portions by temporary, casual, parenthetical interruptions, due to depraved will and disordered pride. All the dangers to which this civilisation had been exposed in its infancy and growth were before his eyes. First, there were the heresies with which the subtle and debased ingenuity of the Greeks had stained and distorted the great but simple mysteries of the faith. Then came the hordes of invaders from the North, sweeping with irresistible force over the regions that the weakness or cowardice of the wearers of the purple left defenceless before them. Before the northern tribes had settled in their possessions, and had full time to assimilate the faith and the institutions which they had found there, the growing organisation was menaced by a more deadly peril in the incessant and steady advance of the bloody and fanatical tribes from the East. And in this way

his mind continued the picture down to the latest days of all, when there had arisen men who, denying God and mocking at Christ, were bent on the destruction of the very foundations of society, and had nothing better to offer mankind than a miserable return to a state of nature.

As he thus reproduced this long drama, one benign and central figure was ever present, changeless in the midst of ceaseless change, laboriously building up with preter-human patience and preter-human sagacity, when other powers, one after another in evil succession, were madly raging to destroy and to pull down, thinking only of the great interests of order and civilisation, of which it had been constituted the eternal protector, and showing its divine origin and inspiration alike by its unfailing wisdom and its unfailing benevolence. It is the Sovereign Pontiff who thus stands forth throughout the history of Europe as 'the great Demiurgus of universal civilisation.' If the Pope had filled only such a position as the Patriarch held at Constantinople, or if there had been no Pope, and Christianity had depended exclusively on the East for its propagation, with no great spiritual organ in the West, what would have become of Western development? It was the energy and resolution of the Pontiffs which resisted the heresies of the East, and preserved to the Christian religion that plainness and intelligibility, without which it would never have made a way to the rude understanding and simple hearts of the barbarians from the North. It was their wise patriotism which protected Italy against the Greek oppression, and by acting the part of mayors of the palace to the decrepit Eastern emperors, it was they who contrived to preserve the independence and maintain the fabric of society until the appearance of the Carlovingsians, in whom, with the rapid instinct of true statesmen, they at once recognised the founders of a new empire of the West. If the Popes,

again, 'had possessed over the Eastern empire the same authority they had over the other, they would have repulsed not only the Saracens, but the Turks too, and none of the evils which these nations have inflicted on us would ever have taken place.'¹ Even as it was, when the Saracens threatened the West, the Popes were the chief agents in organising resistance, and giving spirit and animation to the defenders of Europe. Their alert vision saw that to crush for ever that formidable enemy, it was not enough to defend ourselves against his assaults; we must attack him at home. The Crusades, vulgarly treated as the wars of a blind and superstitious piety, were in truth wars of high policy; and from the Council of Clermont down to the famous day of Lepanto, the hand and spirit of the Pontiff were to be traced in every part of that tremendous struggle which prevented Europe from being handed over to the tyranny, ignorance, and barbarism that have always been the inevitable fruits of Mahometan conquest, and had already stamped out civilisation in Asia Minor, and Palestine, and Greece, once the very garden of the universe.

This admirable and politic heroism of the Popes in the face of foes pressing from without, De Maistre found more than equalled by their wisdom, courage, and activity in organising and developing the elements of a civilised system within. The maxim of old societies had been that which Lucan puts into the mouth of Cæsar, *humanum paucis vivit genus*, and a vast population of slaves had been one of the inevitable social conditions of the period: the Popes never rested from their endeavours to banish servitude from among Christian nations. Women in

(1) De Maistre forgot or under-estimated the services of Leo the Isaurian, whose repulse of the Caliph's forces at Constantinople (A.D. 717) was perhaps as important for Europe as the more renowned victory of Charles Martel. But then Leo was an Iconoclast and heretic. Cf. Finlay's *Byzantine Empire*, pp. 22, 23.

old societies had filled a mean and degraded place : it was reserved for the new spiritual power to rescue the race from that vicious circle in which men had debased the nature of women, and women had given back all the weakness and perversity they had received from men, and to perceive that 'the most effectual way of perfecting the man is to ennoble and exalt the woman.' The organisation of the priesthood, again, was a masterpiece of practical wisdom ; such an order, removed from the fierce or selfish interests of ordinary life by the holy regulation of celibacy, and by the austere discipline of the church, was indispensable in the midst of such a society as that which it was the function of the church to guide. Who but the members of an order thus set apart, acting in strict subordination to the central power, and so presenting a front of unbroken spiritual unity, could have held their way among tumultuous tribes, half-barbarous nobles, and proud and unruly kings, protesting against wrong, passionately inculcating new and higher ideas of right, denouncing the darkness of the false gods, calling on all men to worship the cross and adore the mysteries of the true God ? Compare now the impotency of the Protestant missionary, squatting in gross comfort with wife and babes among the savages he has come to convert, preaching a disputatious doctrine, wrangling openly with the rival sent by some other sect,—compare this impotency with the success that follows the devoted sons of the church, impressing their proselytes with the mysterious virtue of their continence, the self-denial of their lives, the unity of their dogma and their rites ; and then recognise the wisdom of these great churchmen who created a priesthood after this manner in the days when every priest was as the missionary is now. Finally, it was the occupants of the holy chair who prepared, softened, one might almost say sweetened, the occupants of thrones ; it was to them

that providence had confided the education of the sovereigns of Europe. The popes brought up the youth of the European monarchy; they made it, precisely in the same way in which Fénelon made the Duke of Burgundy. In each case the task consisted in eradicating from a fine character an element of ferocity that would have ruined all. 'Everything that constrains a man, strengthens him. He cannot obey without perfecting himself; and by the mere fact of overcoming himself he is better. Any man will vanquish the most violent passion at thirty, because at five or six you have taught him of his own will to give up a plaything or a sweetmeat. That came to pass to the monarchy, which happens to an individual who has been well brought up. The continued efforts of the church directed by the Sovereign Pontiff did what had never been seen before, and what will never be seen again where that authority is not recognised. Insensibly, without threats or laws or battles, without violence and without resistance, the great European charter was proclaimed, not on paper nor by the voice of public criers; but in all European hearts, then all Catholic. Kings surrender the power of judging by themselves, and nations in return declare kings infallible and inviolable. Such is the fundamental law of the European monarchy, and it is the work of the popes.'¹

All this, however, is only the external development of De Maistre's central idea, the historical corroboration of a truth to which he conducts us in the first instance by general considerations. Assuming, what it is less and less characteristic of the present century at any rate to deny, that Christianity was the only actual force by which the regeneration of Europe could be effected after the decline of the Roman civilisation, he insists that, as he again and again expresses it, 'without the

(1) *De Pape*, bk. iii. c. iv. p. 298 (ed. 1866).

Pope there is no veritable Christianity.' What he meant by this condensed form needs a little explanation, as is always the case with such simple statements of the products of long and complex reasoning. In saying that without the Pope there is no true Christianity, what he considered himself as having established was, that unless there be some supreme and independent possessor of authority to settle doctrine, to regulate discipline, to give authentic counsel, to apply accepted principles to disputed cases, then there can be no such thing as a religious system which shall have power to bind the members of a vast and not homogeneous body in the salutary bonds of a common civilisation, nor to guide and inform an universal conscience. In each individual state everybody admits the absolute necessity of having some sovereign power which shall make, declare, and administer the laws, and from whose action in any one of these aspects there shall be no appeal; a power that shall be strong enough to protect the rights and enforce the duties which it has authoritatively proclaimed and enjoined. In free England, as in despotic Turkey, the privileges and obligations which the law tolerates or imposes, and all the benefits which their existence confers on the community, are the creatures and conditions of a supreme authority from which there is no appeal, whether the instrument by which this authority makes its will known be an act of parliament or a ukase. This conception of temporal sovereignty, especially familiarised to our generation by the teaching of Austin, was carried by De Maistre into discussions upon the limits of the Papal power with great ingenuity and force, and, if we accept the premisses, with great success.

It should be said here, that throughout his book on the Pope, De Maistre talks of Christianity exclusively as a statesman or a publicist would talk about it; not theologically

nor spiritually, but politically and socially. The question with which he concerns himself is the utilisation of Christianity as a force to shape and organise a system of civilised societies; a study of the conditions under which this utilisation had taken place in the earlier centuries of the era; and a deduction from them of the conditions under which we might ensure a repetition of the process in changed modern circumstance. In the eighteenth century men were accustomed to ask of Christianity, as Protestants always ask of so much of Catholicism as they have dropped, whether or no it is true. But after the Revolution the question changed, and became an inquiry whether and how Christianity could contribute to the reconstruction of society. People asked less how true it was, than how strong it was; less how many unquestioned *dogmas*, than how much social weight it had or could develop; less as to the precise amount and form of belief that would save a soul, than as to the way in which it might be expected to assist the European community.

It was the strength of this temper in him which led to his extraordinary detestation and contempt for the Greeks. Their turn for pure speculation excited all his anger. In a curious chapter, he exhausts invective in denouncing them.¹ The sarcasm of Sallust delights him, that the actions of Greece were very fine, *verum aliquanto minores quam fama feruntur*. Their military glory was only a flash of about a hundred and fourteen years from Marathon; compare this with the prolonged splendour of Rome, France, and England. In philosophy they displayed decent talent, but even here their true merit is to have brought the wisdom of Asia into Europe, for they invented nothing. Greece was the home of syllogism and of unreason. 'Read Plato: at every page you will draw a

(1) *Du Pape*, bk. iv. c. vii.

striking distinction. As often as he is Greek, he wearies. He is only great, sublime, penetrating, when he is a theologian; in other words, when he is announcing positive and everlasting dogmas, free from all quibble, and which are so clearly marked with the eastern cast that not to perceive it one must never have had a glimpse of Asia. . . . There was in him a sophist and a theologian, or, if you choose, a Greek and a Chaldean.' The Athenians could never pardon one of their great leaders, all of whom fell victims in one shape or another to a temper frivolous as that of a child, ferocious as that of men,—'espèce de moutons enragés, toujours menés par la nature, et toujours par nature dévorant leurs bergers.' As for their oratory, 'the tribunal of Athens would have been the disgrace of mankind if Phocion and men like him, by occasionally ascending it before drinking the hemlock or setting out for their place of exile, had not in some sort balanced such a mass of loquacity, extravagance, and cruelty.'¹

It is very important to remember this constant solicitude for ideas that should work well, in connection with that book of De Maistre's which has had most influence in Europe, by

(1) A remark of Mr. Finlay's is worth quoting here. 'The Greeks,' he says, 'had at times only a secondary share in the ecclesiastical controversies in the Eastern Church, though the circumstance of these controversies having been carried on in the Greek language has made the natives of Western Europe attribute them to a philosophic, speculative, and polemic spirit, inherent in the Hellenic mind. A very slight examination of history is sufficient to prove that several of the heresies which disturbed the Eastern Church had their origin in the more profound religious ideas of the oriental nations, and that many of the opinions called heretical were in a great measure expressions of the mental nationality of the Syrians, Armenians, Egyptians, and Persians, and had no connection whatever with the Greek mind.'—*Byzantine Empire, from 716 to 1057*, p. 262.

The same writer (p. 263) remarks very truly, that 'the religious or theological portion of Popery, as a section of the Christian Church, is really Greek; and it is only the ecclesiastical, political, and theoretic peculiarities of the fabric which can be considered as the work of the Latin Church.'

supplying a base for the theories of ultramontaniam. Unless we perceive very clearly that throughout his ardent speculations on the Papal power his mind was bent upon enforcing the practical solution of a pressing social problem, we easily misunderstand him and underrate what he had to say. A charge has been forcibly urged against him by an English critic, for example, that he has confounded supremacy with infallibility, than which, as the writer truly says, no two ideas can be more perfectly distinct, one being superiority of force, and the other incapacity of error.¹ De Maistre made logical blunders in abundance quite as bad as this, but he was too acute deliberately to erect so elaborate a structure upon a confusion so very obvious, and that must have stared him in the face from the first page of his work to the last. If we look upon his book as a mere general defence of the Papacy, designed to investigate and fortify all its pretensions one by one, we should have great right to complain against having two claims so essentially divergent, treated as though they were the same thing, or could be held in their places by the same supports. But let us regard the treatise on the Pope not as meant to convince free-thinkers or Protestants that divine grace inspires every decree of the holy father, as would have been the right view of it if it had been written fifty years earlier. It was composed within the first twenty years of the present century, when the universe, to men of De Maistre's stamp, seemed once more without form and void. His object, as he tells us more than once, was to find a way of restoring a religion and a morality in Europe; of giving to truth the forces demanded for the conquests that she was meditating; of strengthening the thrones of sovereigns, and of gently calming that general fermentation of spirit which threatened mightier

(1) *Saturday Review*, Sept. 9, 1865, p. 334.

evils than had yet overwhelmed society. From this point of view, we shall see that the distinction between supremacy and infallibility was not worth recognising.

Practically, he says, 'infallibility is only a consequence of supremacy, or rather it is absolutely the same thing under two different names. In effect it is the same thing, *in practice*, not to be subject to error, and not to be liable to be accused of it. Thus, even if we should agree that no divine promise was made to the Pope, he would not be less infallible or deemed so, as the final tribunal; for every judgment from which you cannot appeal, is and must be (*est et doit être*) held for just in every human association, under any imaginable form of government; and every true statesman will understand me perfectly, when I say that the point is to ascertain not only if the Sovereign Pontiff is, but if he must be, infallible.'¹ In another place he says distinctly enough that the infallibility of the Church has two aspects; in one of them it is the object of divine promise, in the other it is a human implication, and that in the latter aspect infallibility is supposed in the Church, just 'as we are absolutely bound to suppose it, even in temporal sovereignties (where it does not really exist), under pain of seeing society dissolved.' The Church only demands what other sovereignties demand, though she has the immense superiority over them of having her claim backed by direct promise from heaven.² 'Take away the dogma, if you will,' in a third place, 'and only consider the thing politically,' which is exactly what he really does all through the book: 'the Pope from this point of view, asks for no other infallibility than that which is attributed to all sovereigns.'³ Without either vindicating or surrendering the

(1) *Du Pape*, bk. i. c. i. p. 17.

(2) *Ibid.* bk. i. c. xix. pp. 124, 125.

(3) *Ibid.* bk. i. c. xvi. p. 111.

supernatural side of the Papal claims, he only insists upon the political, social, or human side of it, as an inseparable quality of an admitted supremacy.¹ In short, from beginning to end of this speculation, from which the best kind of ultramontaniam has drawn its defence, he evinces a deprecatory anxiety—a very rare temper with De Maistre—not to fight on the issue of the dogma of infallibility over which Protestants and unbelievers have won an infinite number of cheap victories; that he leaves as a theme more fitted for the disputations of theologians. My position, he seems to keep saying, is that if the Pope is spiritually supreme, then he is virtually and practically *as if he were* infallible, in the same sense in which the English Parliament and monarch, and the Russian Czar, are as if they were infallible; but let us not argue so much about this, which is only secondary, the main question being whether without the Pope there can be a true Christianity, 'that is to say, a Christianity, active, powerful, converting, regenerating, conquering, perfecting.'

De Maistre was probably conducted to his theory by an analogy, which he tacitly leaned upon more strongly than it could well bear, between temporal organisation and spiritual organisation. In inchoate communities, the momentary self-interest and the promptly stirred passions of men would rend

(1) 'Il n'y a point de souveraineté qui pour le bonheur des hommes, et pour le sien surtout, ne soit bornée de quelque manière, mais dans l'intérieur de ces bornes, placées comme il plaît à Dieu, elle est toujours et partout absolue et tenue pour infallible. Et quand je parle de l'exercice légitime de la souveraineté, je n'entends point ou je ne dis point l'exercice *juste*, ce qui produirait une amphibologie dangereuse, à moins que par ce dernier mot on ne veuille dire que *tout ce qu'elle opine dans son cercle est juste ou tenu pour tel*, ce qui est la vérité. C'est ainsi qu'un tribunal suprême, tant qu'il ne sort pas de ses attributions, est toujours juste; car c'est la même chose DANS LA PRATIQUE, d'être infallible, ou de se tromper sans appel.'—Bk. ii. c. xi. p. 212 (foot-note).

the growing society in pieces, unless they were restrained by the strong hand of law in some shape or other, written or unwritten, and administered by an authority, either physically too strong to be resisted, or else set up by the common consent seeking to further the general convenience. To divide this authority, so that none should know where to look for a sovereign decree, nor be able to ascertain the commands of sovereign law; to embody it in the persons of many discordant expounders, each assuming oracular weight and equal sanction; to leave individuals to administer and interpret it for themselves, and to decide among themselves its application to their own cases; what would this be but a deliberate preparation for anarchy and dissolution? For it is one of the clear conditions of the efficacy of the social union, that every member of it should be able to know for certain the terms on which he belongs to it, the compliances which it will insist upon in him, and the compliances which it will in turn permit him to insist upon in others, and therefore it is indispensable that there should be some definite and admitted centre where this very essential knowledge should be accessible.

Some such reflections as these must have been at the bottom of De Maistre's great apology for the Papal supremacy, or at any rate they may serve to bring before our minds with greater clearness the kind of foundations on which his scheme rested. For law substitute Christianity, for social union spiritual union, for legal obligations the obligations of the faith. Instead of individuals bound together by allegiance to common political institutions, conceive communities united in the bonds of religious brotherhood into a sort of universal republic, under the moderate supremacy of a supreme spiritual power. As a matter of fact, it was the intervention of this spiritual power which restrained the anarchy, internal and external, of the

ferocious and imperfectly organised sovereignties that figure in the early history of modern Europe. And as a matter of theory, what could be more rational and defensible than such an intervention made systematic, with its rightfulness and disinterestedness universally recognised? Grant Christianity as the spiritual basis of the life and action of modern communities; supporting both the organised structure of each of them, and the interdependent system composed of them all; accepted by the individual members of each, and by the integral bodies forming the whole. But who shall declare what the Christian doctrine is, and how its maxims bear upon special cases, and what oracles they announce in particular sets of circumstances? Amid the turbulence of popular passion, in face of the crushing despotism of an insensate tyrant, between the furious hatred of jealous nations or the violent ambition of rival sovereignties, what likelihood would there be of either party to the contention yielding tranquilly and promptly to any presentation of Christian teaching made by the other, or by some suspected neutral as a decisive authority between them? Obviously there must be some supreme and indisputable interpreter, before whose final decree the tyrant should quail, the flood of popular lawlessness flow back within its accustomed banks, and contending sovereigns or jealous nations embrace fraternally. Again, in those questions of faith and discipline, which the ill-exercised ingenuity of men is for ever raising and pressing upon the attention of Christendom, it is just as obvious that there must be some tribunal to pronounce an authoritative judgment. Otherwise, each nation is torn into sects; and amid the throng of sects, where is unity? 'To maintain that a crowd of independent churches form a church, one and universal, is to maintain in other terms that all the political governments of Europe only form a single government, one

and universal.' There could no more be a kingdom of France without a king, nor an empire of Russia without an emperor, than there could be one universal church without an acknowledged head, and that this head must be the successor of St. Peter, is declared alike by the voice of tradition, the explicit testimony of the early writers, the repeated utterances of later theologians of all schools, and that 'general sentiment' which presses itself upon every conscientious reader of religious history.

The argument that the voice of the Church is to be sought in general councils is absurd; to maintain that a council has any other function than to assure and certify the Pope, when he chooses to strengthen his judgment or to satisfy his doubts, is to destroy visible unity; and suppose there to be an equal division of votes, as happened in the famous case of Fénelon, and might as well happen in a general council, the doubt would after all be solved by the final vote of the Pope. And 'what is doubtful for twenty selected men is doubtful for the whole human race: those who suppose that by multiplying the deliberating voices doubt is lessened, must have very little knowledge of men, and can never have sat in a deliberative body.' Again, supposing there to present itself one of those questions of divine metaphysics that it is absolutely necessary to refer to the decision of the supreme tribunal; our interest is not that it should be decided in such or such a manner, but that it should be decided without delay and without appeal. Besides, the world is now grown too vast for general councils, which seem to be made only for the youth of Christianity. In fine, why pursue futile or mischievous discussions as to whether the Pope is above the Council, or the Council above the Pope? Just as in ordinary questions in which the king is conscious of sufficient light, he decides them himself, while the others

in which he is not conscious of this assistance, he transfers to the States-General presided over by himself, but is equally sovereign in either case; so with the Pope and the Council. Let us be content to know, in the words of Thomassin,¹ that 'the Pope in the midst of his Council is above himself, and that the Council decapitated of its chief is below himself.'

The point so constantly dwelt upon by Bossuet, the obligation of the canons upon the Pope, was of very little worth in De Maistre's judgment, and he almost speaks with disrespect of the great Catholic defender for being so prolix and pertinacious in elaborating it. Here again he finds in Thomassin the most concise statement of what he held to be the true view, just as he does in the controversy as to the relative superiority of the Pope or the Council. 'There is only an apparent contradiction,' says Thomassin, 'between saying that the Pope is above the canons, and that he is bound by them; that he is master of the canons, or that he is not. Those who place him above the canons or make him their master, only pretend that he *has a dispensing power over them*; while those who deny that he is above the canons or is their master, mean no more than that *he can only exercise a dispensing power for the convenience and in the necessities of the church*.' This is an excellent illustration of

(1) Thomassin, the eminent French theologian, flourished from the middle to the end of the seventeenth century. The aim of his writings generally was to reconcile conflicting opinions on discipline or doctrine by exhibiting a true sense in all. In this spirit he wrote on the Pope and the councils, and on the never-ending question of Grace. Among others things, he insisted that all languages could be traced to the Hebrew. He wrote a defence of the edict in which Louis XIV. revoked the Edict of Nantes, contending that it was less harsh than some of the decrees of Theodosius and Justinian, which the holiest fathers of the church had not scrupled to approve—an argument which would now be thought somewhat too dangerous for common use, as cutting both ways. Gibbon made use of his *Discipline de l'Eglise* in the twentieth chapter, and elsewhere.

the thoroughly political temper in which De Maistre treats the whole subject. He looks at the power of the Pope over the canons much as a modern English statesman looks at the question of the coronation oath, and the extent to which it binds the monarch to the maintenance of the laws existing at the time of its imposition. In the same spirit he banishes from all account the crowd of nonsensical objections to Papal supremacy, drawn from imaginary possibilities. Suppose a Pope, for example, were to abolish all the canons at a single stroke; suppose him to become an unbeliever; suppose him to go mad; and so forth. 'Why,' De Maistre says, 'there is not in the whole world a single power in a condition to bear all possible and arbitrary hypotheses of this sort; and if you judge them by what they can do, without speaking of what they have done, they will have to be abolished every one.'¹ This, it may be worth noticing, is one of the many passages in De Maistre's writings which, both in the solidity of their argument and the direct force of their expression, recall his great predecessor in the anti-revolutionary cause, the ever-illustrious Burke.

The vigour with which De Maistre sums up all these pleas for supremacy is very remarkable; and to the crowd of enemies and indifferents, and especially to the statesmen who are among them, he appeals with admirable energy. 'What would you then? Do you mean that the nations should live without any religion, and do you not begin to perceive that a religion there must be? And does not Christianity, not only by its intrinsic worth but because it is in possession, strike you as preferable to every other? Have you been better contented with other attempts in this way? Peradventure the twelve apostles might please you better than the philanthropists and Martinists? Does

(1) *Ibid.* bk. i. c. xviii. p. 122.

the Sermon on the Mount seem to you a passable code of morals? And if the entire people were to regulate their conduct on this model, should you be content? I fancy that I hear you reply affirmatively. Well, since the only object now is to maintain this religion for which you thus declare your preference, how could you have, I do not say the stupidity, but the cruelty, to turn it into a democracy, and to place this precious deposit in the hands of the rabble?

‘ You attach too much importance to the dogmatic part of this religion. By what strange contradiction would you desire to agitate the universe for some academic quibble, for miserable wranglings about mere words (these are your own terms)? Is it so then that men are led? Will you call the Bishop of Quebec and the Bishop of Luçon to interpret a line of the Catechism? That believers should quarrel about infallibility is what I know, for I see it; but that statesmen should quarrel in the same way about this great privilege, is what I shall never be able to conceive. . . . That all the bishops in the world should be convoked to determine a divine truth necessary to salvation—nothing more natural, if such a method is indispensable; for no effort, no trouble, ought to be spared for so exalted an aim. But if the only point is the establishment of one opinion in the place of another, then the travelling expenses of even one single Infallible are sheer waste. If you want to spare the two most valuable things on earth, time and money, make all haste to write to Rome, in order to procure thence a lawful decision which shall declare the unlawful doubt. Nothing more is needed; policy asks no more.’¹

Definitely, then, the influence of the Popes restored to their ancient supremacy, would be exercised in the renewal and consolidation of social order resting on the Christian faith,

(1) Bk. i. c. xvii. p. 117.

somewhat after this manner. The anarchic dogma of the sovereignty of peoples, having failed to do anything beyond showing that the greatest evils resulting from obedience do not equal the thousandth part of those which result from rebellion, would be superseded by the practice of appeals to the authority of the Holy See. Do not suppose that the Revolution is at an end, or that the column is replaced because it is raised up from the ground. 'A man must be blind not to see that all the sovereignties in Europe are growing weak; on all sides confidence and affection are deserting them; sects and the spirit of individualism are multiplying themselves in an appalling manner.' There are only two alternatives: you must either purify the will of men, or else you must enchain it; the monarch who will not do the first, must enslave his subjects or perish; servitude or spiritual unity is the only choice open to nations. On the one hand is the gross and unrestrained tyranny of what in modern phrase is styled Imperialism, and on the other a wise and benevolent modification of temporal sovereignty in the interests of all by an established and accepted spiritual power. No middle path lies before the people of Europe. Temporal absolutism we must have. The only question is whether or no it shall be modified by the wise, disinterested, and moderating counsels of the Church, as given by her consecrated chief.

There can be very little doubt that the effective way in which De Maistre propounded and vindicated this theory made a deep impression on the mind of Comte. Very early in his career this eminent man had declared, 'De Maistre has for me the peculiar property of helping me to estimate the philosophic capacity of people, by the repute in which they hold him;' and among his other reasons at that time for thinking well of M. Guizot was that notwithstanding his transcendent Protestantism

he complied with the test of appreciating De Maistre.¹ Comte's rapidly assimilative intelligence perceived that here at last there was a definite, consistent, and intelligible scheme for the re-organisation of European society, with him the great end of philosophic endeavour; and its principle of the division of the spiritual and temporal powers, and of the relation that ought to subsist between the two, was the base of Comte's own scheme.

In general form the plans of social reconstruction are identical; in substance, it need scarcely be said, the differences are fundamental. The temporal power, according to Comte's design, is to reside with industrial chiefs, and the spiritual power to rest upon a doctrine scientifically established. De Maistre, on the other hand, believed that the old authority of kings and Christian pontiffs was divine, and any attempt to supersede it in either case would have seemed to him as desperate as it seemed impious. In his strange speculation on *Le Principe Générateur des Constitutions Politiques*, he contends that all laws in the true sense of the word (which by the way happens to be decidedly an arbitrary and exclusive sense) are of supernatural origin, and that the only persons whom we have any right to call legislators, were those half-divine men who appear mysteriously in the early history of nations, and counterparts to whom we never meet with in later days. Elsewhere he maintains to the same effect, that royal families in the true sense of the word 'are growths of nature, and differ from others, as a tree differs from a shrub.' People suppose a family to be royal because it reigns; on the contrary, it reigns because it is royal, because it has more life, *plus d'esprit royal*, as mysterious and occult a force as the *virtus dormitiva* of opium. The common life of man is about thirty years; the average duration of the reigns of European sovereigns, being

(1) Littré, *Augusto Comte et la Phil. Posit.*, p. 152.

Christian, is at the very lowest calculation twenty. How is it possible that 'lives should be only thirty years, and reigns from twenty-two to twenty-five, if princes had not more common life than other men?' Mark, again, the influence of religion in the duration of sovereignties. All the Christian reigns are longer than all the non-Christian reigns, ancient and modern, and Catholic reigns have been longer than Protestant reigns; the reigns in England, which averaged more than twenty-three years before the Reformation, have only been seventeen years since, and those of Sweden, which were twenty-two, have fallen to the same figure of seventeen. Denmark, however, for some unknown cause does not appear to have undergone this law of abbreviation; so, says De Maistre with rather unwonted restraint, let us abstain from generalising. As a matter of fact, however, the generalisation was complete in his own mind, and there was nothing inconsistent with his view of the government of the universe in the fact that a Catholic prince should live longer than a Protestant; indeed such a fact was the natural condition of his view being true. Many differences among the people who hold to the theological interpretation of the circumstances of life arise from the different degrees of activity which they variously attribute to the intervention of God, from those who explain the fall of a sparrow to the ground by a special and direct energy of the divine will, up to those at the opposite end of the scale, who think that direct participation ended when the universe was once fairly launched. De Maistre was of those who see the divine hand on every side and at all times. If, then, Protestantism was a pernicious rebellion against the faith which God had provided for the comfort and salvation of men, why should not God be likely to visit princes, as offenders with the least excuse for their backslidings, with the curse of shortness of days?

In a trenchant passage De Maistre has expounded the Protestant confession of faith, and shown what astounding gaps it leaves as an interpretation of the dealings of God with man. 'By virtue of a terrible anathema,' he supposes the Protestant to say, 'inexplicable no doubt, but much less inexplicable than incontestable, the human race lost all its rights. Plunged in mortal darkness, it was ignorant of all, since it was ignorant of God; and, being ignorant of him, it could not pray to him, so that it was spiritually dead without being able to ask for life. Arrived by rapid degradation at the last stage of debasement, it outraged nature by its manners, its laws, even by its religions. It consecrated all vices, it wallowed in filth, and its depravation was such that the history of those times forms a dangerous picture, which it is not good for all men so much as to look upon. God, however, *having dissembled for forty centuries*, bethought him of his creation. At the appointed moment announced from all time, he did not despise a virgin's womb; he clothed himself in our unhappy nature, and appeared on the earth; we saw him, we touched him, he spoke to us; he lived, he taught, he suffered, he died for us. He arose from his tomb according to his promise; he appeared again among us, solemnly to assure to his Church a succour that would last as long as the world.

'But, alas, this effort of almighty benevolence was a long way from securing all the success that had been foretold. For lack of knowledge, or of strength, or by distraction maybe, God missed his aim, and could not keep his word. Less sage than a chemist who should undertake to shut up ether in canvas or paper, he only confided to men the truth that he had brought upon the earth; it escaped, then, as one might have foreseen, by all human pores; soon, this holy religion revealed to man by the Man-God, became no more than an infamous

idolatry, which would remain to this very moment if Christianity after sixteen centuries had not been suddenly brought back to its original purity by a couple of sorry creatures.'¹ Perhaps it would be easier than he supposed to present his own system in an equally irrational aspect. If you measure the proceedings of omnipotence by the uses to which a wise and benevolent man would put such superhuman power, if we can imagine a man of this kind endowed with it, De Maistre's theory of the extent to which a supreme being interferes in human things, is after all only a degree less ridiculous and illogical, less inadequate and abundantly assailable, than that Protestantism which he so heartily despised. Would it be difficult, after borrowing the account, which we have just read, of the tremendous efforts made by a benign creator to shed moral and spiritual light upon the world, to perplex the Catholic as bitterly as the Protestant, by confronting him both with the comparatively scanty results of those efforts, and with the too visible tendencies of all the foremost agencies in modern civilisation to leave them out of account as forces practically spent?

De Maistre has been surpassed by no thinker that we know of as a defender of the old order. If anybody could rationalise the idea of supernatural intervention in human affairs, the idea of a Papal supremacy, the idea of a spiritual unity, De Maistre's acuteness and intellectual vigour, and, above all, his keen sense of the urgent social need of such a thing being done, would assuredly have enabled him to do it. In 1817, when he wrote the work in which this task is attempted, the hopelessness of such an achievement was less obvious than it is now. The Bourbons had been restored. The Revolution lay in a deep slumber that many persons excusably took for the quiescence of

(1) *Du Pape*, Conclusion, p. 380.

extinction. Legitimacy and the spiritual system that was its ally in the face of the Revolution, though mostly its rival or foe when they were left alone together, seemed to be restored to the fulness of their power. Fifty years have elapsed since then, and each year has seen a progressive decay in the principles which then were triumphant. It was not, therefore, without reason that De Maistre warned people against believing 'que la colonne est remplacée, parcequ'elle est relevée.' The solution which he so elaborately recommended to Europe has shown itself desperate and impossible. Catholicism may long remain a vital creed to millions of men, a deep source of spiritual consolation and refreshment, and a bright lamp in perplexities of conduct and morals; but resting on dogmas which cannot by any amount of compromise be incorporated with the daily increasing mass of knowledge, assuming as the condition of its existence forms of the theological hypothesis which all the preponderating influences of contemporary thought concur directly or indirectly in discrediting, upheld by an organisation which its history for the last five centuries has exposed to the distrust and hatred of men as the sworn enemy of mental freedom and growth, the pretensions of Catholicism to renovate society are among the most pitiable and impotent that ever devout, high-minded, and benevolent persons deluded themselves into maintaining or accepting. Over the modern invader it is as powerless as paganism was over the invaders of old. The barbarians of industrialism, grasping chiefs and mutinous men, give no ear to priest or pontiff, who speak only dead words, who confront modern issues with blind eyes, and who stretch out but a palsied hand to help. 'Christianity,' according to a well-known saying, 'has been tried and failed; the religion of Christ remains to be tried.' One would prefer to qualify the first clause, by admitting how much Christianity

has done for Europe even with its old organisation, and to restrict the charge of failure within the limits of the modern time. To-day its failure is too patent. Whether in changed forms and with new supplements, the teaching of its founder is destined to be the chief inspirer of that social and human sentiment which seems to be the only spiritual bond capable of uniting men together again in a common and effective faith, is a question which it is unnecessary to discuss here. 'They talk about *the first centuries of Christianity*,' said De Maistre; 'I would not be sure that they are over yet.' Perhaps not; only if the first centuries are not yet over, it is certain that the Christianity of the future will have to be so different from the Christianity of the past, as almost to demand or deserve another name.

Even if Christianity, itself renewed, could successfully encounter the achievement of renewing society, De Maistre's ideal of a spiritual power controlling the temporal power, and conciliating peoples with their rulers by persuasion and a coercion only moral, appears to have little chance of being realised. The separation of the two powers is sealed, with a completeness that is increasingly visible; and the principles on which the process of the emancipation of politics is being so rapidly carried on, demonstrate that the most marked tendencies of modern civilisation are strongly hostile to a renewal in any imaginable shape, or at any future time, of a connection whether of virtual subordination or nominal equality, which has laid such enormous burdens on the consciences and understandings of men. If the Church has the uppermost hand, except in primitive times, it destroys freedom; if the State is supreme, it destroys spirituality. The free church in the free state is an idea that every day more fully recommends itself to the public opinion of Europe, and the sovereignty of the Pope,

like that of all other spiritual potentates, can only be exercised over those who choose of their own accord to submit to it; a sovereignty of a kind which De Maistre thought not much above anarchy.

To conclude, De Maistre's mind was of the highest type of those who fill the air with the arbitrary assumptions of theology, and the abstractions of the metaphysical stage of thought. At every point you meet the peremptorily-declared volition of a divine being, or the ontological property of a natural object. The French Revolution is explained by the will of God; and the kings reign because they have the *esprit royal*. Every truth is absolute, not relative; every explanation is universal, not historic. These differences in method and point of view amply explain his arrival at conclusions that seem so monstrous to men who look upon all knowledge as relative, and insist that the only possible road to true opinion lies away from volitions and abstractions in the positive generalisations of experience. There can be no more satisfactory proof of the rapidity with which we are leaving these ancient methods, and the social results which they produced, than the willingness with which every rightly-instructed mind now admits how indispensable were the first, and how beneficial the second. Those can best appreciate De Maistre and his school, what excellence lay in their aspirations, what wisdom in their system, who know most clearly why their aspirations were hopeless, and what makes their system an anachronism.

CARLYLE.

CARLYLE.

THE new library edition of Mr. Carlyle's works may be taken for the final presentation of all that the author has to say to his contemporaries, and to possess the settled form in which he wishes his words to go to those of posterity who may prove to have ears for them. The canon is definitely made up, and the whole of the golden Gospel of Silence effectively compressed in thirty fine volumes. After all has been said about self-indulgent mannerisms, moral perversities, phraseological outrages, and the rest, these volumes will remain the noble monument of the industry, originality, conscientiousness, and genius of a noble character, and of an intellectual career that has exercised on many sides the profoundest sort of influence upon English feeling. Men who have long since moved far away from these spiritual latitudes, like those who still find an adequate shelter in them, can hardly help feeling as they turn the pages of the now disused pieces which they were once wont to ponder daily, that whatever later teachers may have done in definitely shaping opinion, in giving specific form to sentiment, and in subjecting impulse to rational discipline, here was the friendly fire-bearer who first conveyed the Promethean spark, here the prophet who first smote the rock.

That with this sense of obligation to the master, there mixes a less satisfactory reminiscence of youthful excess in imitative phrases, in unseasonably apostolic readiness towards exhortation and rebuke, in interest about the soul, a portion of which might more profitably have been converted into care for

the head, is in most cases true. A hostile observer of bands of Carlylites at Oxford and elsewhere might have been justified in describing the imperative duty of work as the theme of many an hour of strenuous idleness, and the superiority of golden silence over silver speech as the text of endless bursts of jerky rapture, while a too constant invective against cant had its usual effect of developing cant with a difference. To the incorrigibly sentimental all this was sheer poison, which continues tenaciously in the system. Others of robuster character no sooner came into contact with the world and its fortifying exigencies, than they at once began to assimilate the wholesome part of what they had taken in, while the rest falls gradually and silently out. When criticism has done its just work on the disagreeable affectations of many of Mr. Carlyle's disciples, and on the nature of Mr. Carlyle's opinions and their worth as specific contributions, very few people will be found to deny that his influence in stimulating moral energy, in kindling enthusiasm for virtues worthy of enthusiasm, and in stirring a sense of the reality on the one hand, and the unreality on the other, of all that men can do or suffer, has not been surpassed by any teacher now living.

One of Mr. Carlyle's chief and just glories is, that for more than forty years he has clearly seen, and kept constantly and conspicuously in his own sight and that of his readers, the profoundly important crisis in the midst of which we are living. The moral and social dissolution in progress about us, and the enormous peril of sailing blindfold and haphazard, without rudder or compass or chart, have always been fully visible to him, and it is no fault of his if they have not become equally plain to his contemporaries. The policy of drifting has had no countenance from him. That a society should be likely to last with hollow and scanty faith, with no government, with a

number of institutions hardly one of them real, with a steadily increasing mass of poverty-stricken and hopeless subjects; that, if it should last, it could be regarded as other than an abomination of desolation, he has boldly and often declared to be things incredible. We are not promoting the objects which the social union subsists to fulfil, nor applying with energetic spirit to the task of preparing a sounder state for our successors. The relations between master and servant, between capitalist and labourer, between landlord and tenant, between governing race and subject race, between the feelings and intelligence of the legislature and the feelings and intelligence of the nation, between the spiritual power, literary and ecclesiastical, and those who are under it,—the anarchy that prevails in all these, and the extreme danger of it, have been with Mr. Carlyle a never-ending theme. What seems to many of us the extreme inefficiency or worse of his solutions, still allows us to feel grateful for the vigour and perspicacity with which he has pressed on the world the urgency of the problem.

The degree of durability which his influence is likely to possess with the next and following generations is another and rather sterile question, which we are not now concerned to discuss. The unrestrained eccentricities which Mr. Carlyle's strong individuality has precipitated in his written style may, in spite of the poetic fineness of his imagination, which no historian or humorist has excelled, still be expected to deprive his work of that permanence which is only secured by classic form. The incorporation of so many phrases, allusions, nick-names, that belong only to the hour, inevitably makes the vitality of the composition conditional on the vitality of these transient and accidental elements which are so deeply imbedded in it. Another consideration is that no philosophic writer, however ardently his words may have been treasured and

followed by the people of his own time, can well be cherished by succeeding generations, unless his name is associated through some definable and positive contribution with the central march of European thought and feeling. In other words, there is a difference between living in the history of literature or belief, and living in literature itself and in the minds of believers. Mr. Carlyle has been a most powerful solvent, but it is the tendency of solvents to become merely historic. The historian of the intellectual and moral movements of Great Britain during the present century, will fail egregiously in his task if he omits to give a large and conspicuous space to the author of *Sartor Resartus*. But it is one thing to study historically the ideas which have influenced our predecessors, and another thing to seek in them an influence fruitful for ourselves. It is to be hoped that one may doubt the permanent soundness of Mr. Carlyle's peculiar speculations, without either doubting or failing to share that warm affection and reverence which his personality has worthily inspired in many thousands of his readers. He has himself taught us to separate these two sides of a man, and we have learnt from him to love Samuel Johnson without reading much or a word that the old sage wrote. 'Sterling and I walked westward,' he says once, 'arguing copiously, but *except* in opinion not disagreeing.'

It is none the less for what has just been said a weightier and a rarer privilege for a man to give a stirring impulse to the moral activity of a generation, than to write in classic style; and to have impressed the spirit of his own personality deeply upon the minds of multitudes of men, than to have composed most of those works which the world is said not willingly to let die. Nor, again, is to say that this higher renown belongs to Mr. Carlyle, to underrate the less resounding, but most sub-

stantial, services of a definite kind which he has rendered both to literature and history. This work may be in time superseded with the advance of knowledge, but the value of the first service will remain unimpaired. It was he, as has been said, 'who first taught England to appreciate Goethe;' and not only to appreciate Goethe, but to recognise and seek yet further knowledge of the genius and industry of Goethe's countrymen. His splendid drama of the French Revolution has done, and may be expected long to continue to do, more to bring before our slow-moving and unimaginative public the portentous meaning of that tremendous cataclysm, than all the other writings on the subject in the English language put together. His presentation of Puritanism and the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell first made the most elevating period of the national history in any way really intelligible. The Life of Frederick the Second, whatever judgment we may pass upon its morality, or even upon its place as a work of historic art, is a model of laborious and exhaustive narration of facts not before accessible to the reader of history. For all this, and for much other work eminently useful and meritorious even from the mechanical point of view, Mr. Carlyle deserves the warmest recognition. His genius gave him a right to mock at the ineffectiveness of Dryasdust, but his genius was also too true to prevent him from adding the always needful supplement of a painstaking industry that rivals Dryasdust's own most strenuous toil. Take out of the mind of the English reader of ordinary cultivation and the average journalist, usually a degree or two lower than this, their conceptions of the French Revolution and the English Rebellion, and their knowledge of German literature and history, as well as most of their acquaintance with the prominent men of the eighteenth century, and we shall see how much work Mr. Carlyle has done simply as schoolmaster.

This, however, is emphatically a secondary aspect of his character, and of the function which he has fulfilled in relation to the more active tendencies of modern opinion and feeling. We must go on to other ground, if we would find the field in which he has laboured most ardently and with most acceptance. History and literature have been with him, what they will always be with wise and understanding minds of creative and even of the higher critical faculty,—only embodiments, illustrations, experiments, for ideas about religion, conduct, society, history, government, and all the other great heads and departments of a complete social doctrine. From this point of view, the time has perhaps come when we may fairly attempt to discern some of the tendencies which Mr. Carlyle has initiated or accelerated and deepened, though assuredly many years must elapse before any adequate measure can be taken of their force and final direction.

It would be a comparatively simple process to affix the regulation labels of philosophy ; to say that Mr. Carlyle is a Pantheist in religion (or a Pot-theist, to use the alternative whose flippancy gave such offence to Sterling on one occasion¹), a Transcendentalist or Intuitionist in ethics, an Absolutist in politics, and so forth, with the addition of a cloud of privative or negative epithets at discretion. But classifications of this sort are the worst enemies of true knowledge. Such names are by the vast majority even of persons who think themselves educated, imperfectly apprehended, ignorantly interpreted, and crudely and recklessly applied. It is not too much to say that nine out of ten people who think they have delivered themselves of a criticism when they call Mr. Carlyle a Pantheist, could neither explain with any precision what Pantheism is, nor have ever thought of determining the parts of his writings

(1) *Life of John Sterling*, p. 153.

where this particular monster is believed to lurk. Labels are devices for saving talkative persons the trouble of thinking. As I once wrote elsewhere :—

‘The readiness to use general names in speaking of the greater subjects, and the fitness which qualifies a man to use them, commonly exist in inverse proportions. If we reflect on the conditions out of which ordinary opinion is generated, we may well be startled at the profuse liberality with which names of the widest and most complex and variable significance are bestowed on all hands. The majority of the ideas which constitute most men’s intellectual stock-in-trade have accrued by processes quite distinct from fair reasoning and consequent conviction. This is so notorious, that it is amazing how so many people can go on freely and rapidly labelling thinkers or writers with names which they themselves are not competent to bestow, and which their hearers are not competent either to understand generally, or to test in the specific instance.’

These labels are rather more worthless than usual in the present case, because Mr. Carlyle is ostentatiously illogical and defiantly inconsistent; and, therefore, the term which might correctly describe one side of his teaching or belief would be tolerably sure to give a wholly false impression of some of its other sides. The qualifications necessary to make any one of the regular epithets fairly applicable would have to be so many, that the glosses would virtually overlay the text. We shall be more likely to reach an instructive appreciation by discarding such substitutes for examination, and considering, not what pantheistic, absolutist, transcendental, or any other doctrine means, or what it is worth, but what it is that Mr. Carlyle means about men, their character, their relations to one another, and what that is worth.

With most men and women the master element in their opinions is obviously neither their own reason nor their own imagination, independently exercised, but only mere use and wont, chequered by fortuitous sensations, and modified in the better cases by the influence of a favourite teacher; while in the worse the teacher is the favourite, who happens to chime in most harmoniously with prepossessions, or most effectually to nurse and exaggerate them. Among the superior minds the balance between reason and imagination is scarcely ever held exactly true, nor is either firmly kept within the precise bounds that are proper to it. It is a question of temperament which of the two mental attitudes becomes fixed and habitual, as it is a question of temperament how violently either of them straitens and distorts the normal faculties of vision. The man who prides himself on a hard head, which would usually be better described as a thin head, may and constantly does fall into a confirmed manner of judging character and circumstance, so narrow, one-sided, and elaborately superficial, as to make common sense shudder at the crimes that are committed in the divine name of reason. Excess on the other side leads people into emotional transports, in which the pre-eminent respect that is due to truth, the difficulty of discovering truth, the narrowness of the way that leads thereto, the merits of intellectual precision and definiteness, and even the merits of moral precision and definiteness, are all effectually veiled by purple or fiery clouds of anger, sympathy, and sentimentalism, which imagination has hung over the intelligence.

The familiar distinction between the poetic and the scientific temper is another way of stating the same difference. The one fuses or crystallises external objects and circumstances in the medium of human feeling and passion; the other is concerned with the relations of objects and circumstances among them.

selves, including in them all the facts of human consciousness, and with the discovery and classification of these relations. There is, too, a corresponding distinction between the aspects which conduct, character, social movement, and the objects of nature are able to present, according as we scrutinise them with a view to exactitude of knowledge, or are stirred by some appeal which they make to our various faculties and forms of sensibility, our tenderness, sympathy, awe, terror, love of beauty, and all the other emotions in this momentous catalogue. The starry heavens have one side for the astronomer, as astronomer, and another for the poet, as poet. The nightingale, the skylark, the cuckoo, move one sort of interest in an ornithologist, and a very different sort in a Shelley or a Wordsworth. The hoary and stupendous formations of the inorganic world, the thousand tribes of insects, the great universe of plants, from those whose size and form and hue make us afraid as if they were deadly monsters, down to 'the meanest flower that blows,' all these are clothed with one set of attributes by scientific intelligence, and with another by sentiment, fancy, and imaginative association.

The contentiousness of rival schools of philosophy has obscured the application of the same distinction to the various orders of fact more nearly and immediately relating to man and the social union. One school has maintained the virtually unmeaning doctrine that the will is free, and therefore its followers never gave any quarter to the idea that man was as proper an object of scientific scrutiny morally and historically, as they could not deny him to be anatomically and physiologically. Their enemies have been more concerned to dislodge them from this position, than to fortify, organise, and cultivate their own. The consequences have not been without their danger. Poetic persons have rushed in where scientific persons

ought not to have feared to tread. That human character and the order of events have their poetic aspect, and that their poetic treatment demands the rarest and most valuable qualities of mind, is a truth which none but narrow and superficial men of the world are rash enough to deny. But that there is a scientific aspect of these things, an order among them that can only be understood and criticised and effectually modified scientifically, by using all the caution and precision and infinite patience of the truly scientific spirit, is a truth that is constantly ignored even by men and women of the loftiest and most humane nature. In such cases misdirected and uncontrolled sensibility ends in mournful waste of their own energy, in the certain disappointment of their own aims, and where such sensibility is backed by genius, eloquence, and a peculiar set of public conditions, in prolonged and fatal disturbance of society.

Rousseau was the great type of this triumphant and dangerous sophistry of the emotions. The Rousseau of these times for English-speaking nations is Thomas Carlyle. An apology is perhaps needed for mentioning one of such simple, veracious, disinterested, and wholly highminded life, in the same breath with one of the least sane men that ever lived. Community of method, like misery, makes men acquainted with strange bed-fellows. Two men of very different degrees of moral worth may notoriously both preach the same faith and both pursue the same method, and the method of Rousseau is the method of Mr. Carlyle. With each of them thought is an aspiration, and justice a sentiment, and society a retrogression. Each bids us look within our own bosoms for truth and right, postpones reason to feeling, and refers to introspection and a factitious something styled Nature, questions only to be truly solved by external observation and history. In connection with each of

them has been exemplified the cruelty inherent in sentimentalism, when circumstances draw away the mask. Not the least conspicuous of the disciples of Rousseau was Robespierre. His works lay on the table of the Committee of Public Safety. The theory of the Reign of Terror was invented, and mercilessly reduced to practice, by men whom the visions of Rousseau had fired, and who were not afraid nor ashamed to wade through oceans of blood to the promised land of humanity and fine feeling. We in our days have seen the same result of sentimental doctrine in the barbarous love of the battle-field, the retrograde passion for methods of repression, the contempt for human life, the impatience of orderly and peaceful solution. We begin with introspection and the Eternities, and end in blood and iron. Again, Rousseau's first piece was an anathema upon the science and art of his time, and a denunciation of books and speech. Mr. Carlyle, in exactly the same spirit, has denounced logic mills, warned us all away from literature, and habitually subordinated discipline of the intelligence to the passionate assertion of the will. There are passages in which he speaks respectfully of Intellect, but he is always careful to show that he is using the term in a special sense of his own, and confounding it with 'the exact summary of human *Worth*,' as in one place he defines it. Thus, instead of co-ordinating moral worthiness with intellectual energy, virtue with intelligence, right action of the will with scientific processes of the understanding, he has either placed one immeasurably below the other, or else has mischievously insisted on treating them as identical. The dictates of a kind heart are of superior force to the maxims of political economy; swift and peremptory resolution is a safer guide than a balancing judgment. If the will works easily and surely, we may assume the rectitude of the moving impulse. All this is no caricature of a system

which sets sentiment, sometimes hard sentiment and sometimes soft sentiment, above reason and method.

In other words, the writer who in these days has done more than anybody else to fire men's hearts with a feeling for right and an eager desire for social activity, has with deliberate contempt thrust away from him the only instruments by which we can make sure what right is, and that our social action is wise and effective. A born poet, only wanting perhaps a clearer feeling for form and a more delicate spiritual self-possession, to have added another name to the illustrious catalogue of English singers, he has been driven by the impetuosity of his sympathies to attack the scientific side of social questions in an imaginative and highly emotional manner. Depth of benevolent feeling is unhappily no proof of fitness for handling complex problems, and a fine sense of the picturesque no more a qualification for dealing effectively with the difficulties of an old society, than the composition of Wordsworth's famous sonnet on Westminster Bridge was any reason for supposing that the author would have made a competent Commissioner of Works.

Why should society, with its long and deep-hidden processes of growth, its innumerable intricacies and far-off historic complexities, be as an open book to any reader of its pages who brings acuteness and passion, but no patience nor calm accuracy of meditation? Objects of thought and observation far simpler, more free from all blinding and distorting elements, more accessible to direct and ocular inspection, are by rational consent reserved for the calmest and most austere moods and methods of human intelligence. Nor is denunciation of the conditions of a problem the quickest step towards solving it. Vituperation of the fact that supply and demand practically regulate certain kinds of bargain, is no contribution to systematic efforts to discover some more moral regulator. Take

all the invective that Mr. Carlyle has poured out against political economy, the Dismal Science, and Gospel according to M'Croudy. Granting the absolute and entire inadequateness of political economy to sum up the laws and conditions of a healthy social state,—and no one more than the present writer deploras the mischief which the application of the maxims of political economy by ignorant and selfish spirits has effected in confirming the worst tendencies of the commercial character,—yet is it not a first condition of our being able to substitute better machinery for the ordinary rules of self-interest, that we know scientifically how those rules do and must operate? Again, in another field, it is well to cry out, 'Caitiff, we hate thee,' with a 'hatred, a hostility inexorable, unappeasable, which blasts the scoundrel, and all scoundrels ultimately, into black annihilation and disappearance from the scene of things.'¹ But this is slightly vague. It is not scientific. There are caitiffs and caitiffs. There is a more and a less of scoundrelism, as there is a more and a less of black annihilation, and we must have systematic jurisprudence, with its classification of caitiffs, and its graduated blasting. Has Mr. Carlyle's passion, or have the sedulous and scientific labours of that Bentham, whose name with him is a symbol of evil, done most in what he calls the Scoundrel-province of Reform within* the last half-century? Sterling's criticism on Teufelsdröckh told a hard but wholesome truth to Teufelsdröckh's creator. 'Wanting peace himself,' said Sterling, 'his fierce dissatisfaction fixes on all that is weak, corrupt, and imperfect around him; and instead of a calm and steady co-operation with all those who are endeavouring to apply the highest ideas as remedies for the worst evils, he holds himself in savage isolation.'²

(1) *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. II. Model Prisons, p. 92.

(2) Letter to Mr. Carlyle, in the *Life*, Pt. ii. c. ii.

Mr. Carlyle assures us of Bonaparte that he had an instinct of nature better than his culture was, and illustrates it by the story that during the Egyptian expedition, when his scientific men were busy arguing that there could be no God, Bonaparte, looking up to the stars, confuted them decisively by saying, 'Very ingenious, Messieurs; but *who made* all that?' Surely the most inconclusive answer since coxcombs vanquished Berkeley with a grin. It is, however, a type of Mr. Carlyle's faith in the instinct of nature, as superseding the necessity for patient logical method; a faith, in other words, in crude and uninterpreted sense. Insight, indeed, goes far, but it no more entitles its possessor to dispense with reasoned discipline and system in treating scientific subjects, than it relieves him from the necessity of conforming to the physical conditions of health. Why should society be the one field of thought in which a man of genius is at liberty to assume all his major premisses, and swear all his conclusions?

The deep unrest of unsatisfied souls meets its earliest solace in the effective and sympathetic expression of the same unrest from the lips of another. To look it in the face is the first approach to a sedative. To find our discontent with the actual, our yearning for an undefined ideal, our aspiration after impossible heights of being, shared and amplified in the emotional speech of a man of genius, is the beginning of consolation. Some of the most generous spirits a hundred years ago found this in the eloquence of Rousseau, and some of the most generous spirits of this time and place have found it in the writer of the *Sartor*. In ages not of faith, there will always be multitudinous troops of people crying for the moon. If such sorrowful pastime be ever permissible to men, it has been natural and lawful this long while in præ-revolutionary

England, as it was natural and lawful a century since in præ-revolutionary France. A man born into a community where political forms, from the monarchy down to the popular chamber, are mainly hollow shams disguising the coarse supremacy of wealth, where religion is mainly official and political, and is ever too ready to dis sever itself alike from the spirit of justice, the spirit of charity, and the spirit of truth, and where literature does not as a rule permit itself to discuss serious subjects frankly and worthily—a community, in short, where the great aim of all classes and orders with power is by dint of rigorous silence, fast shutting of the eyes, and stern stopping of the ears, somehow to keep the social pyramid on its apex, and to preserve for England its glorious fame as a paradise for the well-to-do, a purgatory for the able, and a hell for the poor—why, a man born into all this with a heart something softer than a flint, and with intellectual vision something more acute than that of a Troglodyte, may well be allowed to turn aside and cry for moons for a season.

Impotent unrest, however, is followed in Mr. Carlyle by what is socially an impotent solution, just as it was with Rousseau. To bid a man do his duty in one page, and then in the next to warn him sternly away from utilitarianism, from political economy, from all ‘theories of the moral sense,’ and from any other definite means of ascertaining what duty may chance to be, is but a bald and naked counsel. Spiritual nullity and material confusion in a society are not to be repaired by a transformation of egotism, querulous, brooding, marvelling, into egotism, active, practical, objective, not uncomplacent. The moral movements to which the instinctive impulses of humanity fallen on evil times uniformly give birth, early Christianity, for instance, or the socialism of Rousseau, may destroy a society, but they cannot save it unless in cou-

junction with organising policy. A thorough appreciation of fiscal and economic truths was at least as indispensable for the life of the Roman Empire as the acceptance of a Messiah; and it was only in the hands of a great statesman like Gregory VII. that Christianity became at last an instrument powerful enough to save civilisation. What the moral renovation of Rousseau did for France, we all know. Now Rousseau's was far more profoundly social than the doctrine of Mr. Carlyle, which, while in name a renunciation of self, has all its foundations in the purest individualism. Rousseau, notwithstanding the method of *Emile*, treats man as part of a collective whole, contracting manifold relations and owing manifold duties; and he always appeals to the love and sympathy which an imaginary god of nature has implanted in the heart. His aim is unity. Mr. Carlyle, following the same method of obedience to his own personal emotions, unfortified by patient reasoning, lands at the other extremity, and lays all his stress on the separatist instincts. The individual stands alone, confronted by the Eternities; between these and his own soul exists the one central relation. This has all the fundamental egotism of the doctrine of personal salvation, emancipated from fable, and varnished with an emotional phrase. The doctrine has been very widely interpreted, and without any forcing, as a religious expression for the conditions of commercial success.

If we look among our own countrymen, we find that the apostle of self-renunciation is nowhere so beloved as by the best of those whom steady self-reliance and thrifty self-securing and a firm eye to the main chance have got successfully on in the world. A Carlylean anthology, or volume of the master's sentences, might easily be composed, that should contain the highest form of private liturgy accepted by the best of the industrial classes, masters or men. They forgive or overlook

the writer's denunciations of Beaver Industrialisms, which they attribute to his caprice or spleen. This is the worst of an emotional teacher, that people take only so much as they please from him, while with a reasoner they must either refute by reason or else they must accept by reason, and not at simple choice. When trade is brisk, and England is successfully competing in the foreign markets, the books that enjoin silence and self-annihilation have a wonderful popularity in the manufacturing districts. This circumstance is honourable both to them and to him, as far as it goes, but it furnishes some reason for suspecting that our most vigorous moral reformer, so far from propelling us in new grooves, has in truth only given new firmness and coherency to tendencies that were strongly marked enough in the national character before. He has increased the fervour of the country, but without materially changing its objects; there is all the less disguise among us as a result of his teaching, but no radical modification of the sentiments which people are sincere in. The most stirring general appeal to the emotions, to be effective for more than negative purposes, must lead up to definite maxims and specific precepts. As a negative renovation Mr. Carlyle's doctrine was perfect. It effectually put an end to the mood of Byronism. May we say that with the neutralisation of Byron, his most decisive and special work came to an end? May we not say, further, that the true renovation of England, if such a process be ever feasible, will lie in a quite other method than this of emotion? It will lie not in more moral earnestness only, but in a more open intelligence; not merely in a more dogged resolution to work and be silent, but in a ready willingness to use the understanding. The poison of our sins, says Mr. Carlyle in his latest utterance, 'is not intellectual dimness chiefly, but torpid unvaracity of heart.' Yes, but all unvaracity, torpid or fervid,

breeds intellectual dimness, and it is this last which prevents us from seeing a way out of the present ignoble situation. We need light more than heat; intellectual alertness, faith in the reasoning faculty, accessibility to new ideas. To refuse to use the intellect patiently and with system, to decline to seek scientific truth, to prefer effusive indulgence of emotion to the laborious and disciplined and candid exploration of new ideas, is not this, too, a torpid untruthfulness? And has not Mr. Carlyle, by the impatience of his method, done somewhat to deepen it?

It is very well to invite us to moral reform, to bring ourselves to be of heroic mind, as the surest way to 'the blessed Aristocracy of the Wisest.' But how shall we know the wisest when we see them, and how shall a nation know, if not by keen respect and watchfulness for intellectual truth and the teachers of it? Much as we may admire Mr. Carlyle's many gifts, and highly as we may revere his character, it is yet very doubtful whether anybody has as yet learnt from him the precious lesson of scrupulosity and conscientiousness in actively and constantly using the intelligence. This would have been the solid foundation of the true hero-worship.

Let thus much have been said on the head of temperament. The historic position also of every writer is an indispensable key to many things in his teaching.¹ We have to remember in Mr. Carlyle's case, that he was born in the memorable year when the French Revolution, in its narrower sense, was closed by the Whiff of Grapeshot, and when the great century of emancipation and illumination was ending darkly in battles

(1) The dates of Mr. Carlyle's principal compositions are these:—*Life of Schiller*, 1825; *Sartor Resartus*, 1831; *French Revolution*, 1837; *Chartism*, 1839; *Hero-Worship*, 1840; *Past and Present*, 1843; *Cromwell*, 1845; *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 1850; *Friedrich the Second*, 1858 — 1865; *Shooting Niagara*, 1867.

and confusion. During his youth the reaction was in full flow, and the lamp had been handed to runners who not only reversed the ideas and methods, but even turned aside from the goal of their precursors. Hopefulness and enthusiastic confidence in humanity when freed from the fetters of spiritual superstition and secular tyranny, marked all the most characteristic and influential speculations of the two generations before '89. The appalling failure which attended the splendid attempt to realise these hopes in a renewed and perfected social structure, had no more than its natural effect in turning men's minds back, not to the past of Rousseau's imagination, but to the past of recorded history. The single epoch in the annals of Europe since the rise of Christianity, for which no good word could be found, was the epoch of Voltaire. The hideousness of the Christian church in the ninth and tenth centuries was passed lightly over by men who had only eyes for the moral obliquity of the church of the Encyclopædia. The brilliant but profoundly inadequate essays on Voltaire and Diderot were the outcome in Mr. Carlyle of the same reactionary spirit. Nobody now, we may suppose, who is competent to judge, thinks that that estimate of 'the net product of the tumultuous Atheism' of Diderot and his fellow-workers, is a satisfactory account of the influence and significance of the Encyclopædia; nor that to sum up Voltaire, with his burning passion for justice, his indefatigable humanity, his splendid energy in intellectual production, his righteous hatred of superstition, as a supreme master of *persiflage*, can be at all a process partaking of finality. The fact that to the eighteenth century belong the subjects of more than half of these thirty volumes, is a proof of the fascination of the period for an author who has never ceased to villipend it. The saying is perhaps as true in these matters as of private relations, that hatred is not so far removed

from love as indifference is. Be that as it may, the Carlylean view of the eighteenth century as a time of mere scepticism and unbelief, is now clearly untenable to men who remember the fervour of Jean Jacques, and the more rational, but not any less fervid faith of the disciples of Perfectibility. But this was not so clear fifty years since, when the crash and dust of demolition had not subsided enough to let men see how much had risen up behind. The fire of the new school had been taken from the very conflagration which they execrated, but they were not held back from denouncing the eighteenth century by the reflection that, at any rate, its thought and action had made ready the way for much of what is best in the nineteenth.

Mr. Carlyle himself has told us about Coleridge, and the movement of which Coleridge was the leader. That movement has led men in widely different ways. In one direction it has stagnated in the sunless swamps of a theosophy, from which a cloud of sedulous ephemera still suck a little spiritual moisture. In another it led to the sacramental and sacerdotal developments of Anglicanism. In a third, among men with strong practical energy, to the benevolent bluster of a sort of Christianity which is called muscular because it is not intellectual. It would be an error to suppose that these and the other streams that have sprung from the same source, did not in the days of their fulness fertilise and gladden many lands. The wordy pietism of one school, the mimetic rites of another, the romping heroics of the third, are degenerate forms. How long they are likely to endure, it would be rash to predict among a nation whose established teachers and official preachers are prevented by an inveterate timidity from trusting themselves to that disciplined intelligence, in which the superior minds of the last century had such courageous faith.

Mr. Carlyle drank in some sort at the same fountain. Coleridgean ideas were in the air. It was there, probably, that he acquired that sympathy with the past, or with certain portions of the past, that feeling of the unity of history, and that conviction of the necessity of binding our theory of history fast with our theory of other things, in all of which he so strikingly resembles the great Anglican leaders of a generation ago, and in gaining some of which so strenuous an effort must have been needed to modify the prepossessions of a Scotch Puritan education. No one has contributed more powerfully to that movement which, drawing force from many and various sides, has brought out the difference between the historian and the gazetteer or antiquary. One half of *Past and Present* might have been written by one of the Oxford chiefs in the days of the Tracts. Vehement native force was too strong for such a man to remain in the luminous haze which made the Coleridgean atmosphere. A well-known chapter in the *Life of Sterling*, which some, indeed, have found too ungracious, shows how little hold he felt Coleridge's ideas to be capable of retaining, and how little permanent satisfaction resided in them. Coleridge, in fact, was not only a poet but a thinker as well; he had science of a sort as well as imagination, but it was not science for headlong and impatient souls. Mr. Carlyle has probably never been able to endure a sub-division all his life, and the infinite ramifications of the central division between object and subject might well be with him an unprofitable weariness to the flesh.

In England, the greatest literary organ of the Revolution was unquestionably Byron, whose genius, daring, and melodramatic lawlessness, exercised what now seems such an amazing fascination over the least revolutionary of European nations. Unfitted for scientific work and full of ardour, Mr. Carlyle

found his mission in rushing with all his might to the annihilation of this terrible poet, who, like some gorgon, hydra, or chimera dire planted at the gate, carried off a yearly tale of youths and virgins from the city. In literature, only a revolutionist can thoroughly overpower a revolutionist. Mr. Carlyle had fully as much daring as Byron; his writing at its best, if without the many-eyed minuteness and sustained pulsing force of Byron, has still the full swell and tide and energy of genius; he is as lawless in his disrespect for some things established. He had the unspeakable advantage of being that which, though not in this sense, only his own favourite word of contempt describes, respectable; and, for another thing, of being ruggedly sincere. Carlylism is the male of Byronism. 'It is Byronism with thew and sinew, bass pipe and shaggy bosom. There is the same grievous complaint against the time and its men and its spirit, something even of the same contemptuous despair, the same sense of the puniness of man in the centre of a cruel and frowning universe: but there is in Carlylism a deliverance from it all, indeed the only deliverance possible. Its despair is a despair without misery. Labour in a high spirit, duty done, and right service performed in fortitudinous temper,—here was, not indeed a way out, but a way of erect living within.

Against Byronism the ordinary moralist and preacher could really do nothing, because Byronism was an appeal that lay in regions of the mind only accessible by one with an eye and a large poetic feeling for the infinite whole of things. It was not the rebellion only in *Manfred*, nor the wit in *Don Juan*, nor the graceful melancholy of *Childe Harold*, which made their author an idol, and still makes him one to multitudes of Frenchmen and Germans and Italians. One prime secret of it is the air and spaciousness, the freedom and elemental

grandeur of Byron. Who has not felt this to be one of the glories of Mr. Carlyle's work, that it, too, is large and spacious, rich with the fulness of a sense of things unknown and wonderful, and ever in the tiniest part showing us the stupendous and overwhelming whole? The magnitude of the universal forces enlarges the pettiness of man, and the smallness of his achievement and endurance takes a complexion of greatness from the vague immensity that surrounds and palpably mixes with it.

Remember further, that while in Byron the outcome of this was rebellion, in Carlyle its outcome is reverence, a noble mood, which is one of the highest predispositions of the English character. The instincts of sanctification rooted in Teutonic races, and which in the corrupt and unctuous forms of a mechanical religious profession are so revolting, were mocked and outraged, where they were not superciliously ignored, in every line of the one, while in the other they were enthroned under the name of Worship, as the very key and centre of the right life. The prophet who never wearies of declaring that 'only in bowing down before the Higher does man feel himself exalted,' touched solemn organ notes, that awoke a response from dim religious depths, never reached by the stormy wailings of the Byronic lyre. The political side of the reverential sentiment is equally conciliated, and the prime business of individuals and communities pronounced to be the search after worthy objects of this divine quality of reverence. While kings' cloaks and church-tippets are never spared, still less suffered to protect the dishonour of ignoble wearers of them, the inadequateness of aggression and demolition, the necessity of quiet order, the uncounted debt that we owe to rulers and to all sorts of holy and great men who have given this order to the world, all this brought repose and harmony into spirits that

the hollow thunders of universal rebellion against tyrants and priests had worn into thinness and confusion. Again, at the bottom of the veriest *frondeur* with English blood in his veins, in his most defiant moment there lies a conviction that after all something known as common sense is the measure of life, and that to work hard is a demonstrated precept of common sense. Carlylism exactly hits this and brings it forward. We cannot wonder that Byronism was routed from the field.

It may have been in the transcendently firm and clear-eyed intelligence of Goethe that Mr. Carlyle first found a responsive encouragement to the profoundly positive impulses of his own spirit.¹ There is, indeed, a whole heaven betwixt the serenity, balance, and bright composure of the one, and the vehemence, passion, masterful wrath, of the other; and the vast, incessant, exact inquisitiveness of Goethe finds nothing corresponding to it in Mr. Carlyle's multitudinous contempt and indifference, sometimes express and sometimes only very significantly implied, for forms of intellectual activity that do not happen to be personally congenial. But each is a god, though the one sits ever on Olympus, while the other is as one from Tartarus. There is in each, besides all else, a certain remarkable directness of glance, an intrepid and penetrating quality of vision, which defies analysis. Occasional turgidity of phrase and unidiomatic handling of language do not conceal the simplicity of the process by which Mr. Carlyle pierces through obstruction down to the abstrusest depths. And the

(1) *Positive*. No English lexicon as yet seems to justify the use of this word in one of the senses of the French *positif*, as when a historian, for instance, speaks of the *esprit positif* of Bonaparte. We have no word, I believe, that exactly corresponds, so perhaps *positive* with that significance will become acclimatised. A distinct and separate idea of this particular characteristic is indispensable.

important fact is that this abstruseness is not verbal, any more than it is the abstruseness of fog and cloud. His epithet, or image, or trope, shoots like a sunbeam on to the matter, throwing a transfiguring light, even where it fails to pierce to its central core.

Eager for a firm foothold, yet wholly revolted by the too narrow and unelevated positivity of the eighteenth century; eager also for some recognition of the wide realm of the unknowable, yet wholly unsatisfied by the transcendentalism of the English and Scotch philosophic reactions; he found in Goethe that truly free and adequate positivity which accepts all things as parts of a natural or historic order, and while insisting on the recognition of the actual conditions of this order as indispensable, and condemning attempted evasions of such recognition as futile and childish, yet opens an ample bosom for all forms of beauty in art and for all nobleness in moral aspiration. That Mr. Carlyle has reached this high ground we do not say. Temperament has kept him down from it. But it is after this that he has striven. The tumid nothingness of pure transcendentalism he has always abhorred. Some of Mr. Carlyle's favourite phrases have disguised from his readers the intensely practical turn of his whole mind. His constant presentation of the Eternities, the Immensities, and the like, has veiled his almost narrow adherence to plain record without moral comment, and his often cynical respect for the dangerous, yet, when rightly qualified and guided, the solid formula that What is, is. The Eternities and Immensities are only a kind of awful background. The highest souls are held to be deeply conscious of these vast unspeakable presences, yet even with them they are only inspiring accessories; the true interest lies in the practical attitude of such men towards the actual and palpable circumstances that surround them. This spirituality,

whose place in Mr. Carlyle's teaching has been so extremely mis-stated, sinks wholly out of sight in connection with such heroes as the coarse and materialist Bonaparte, of whom, however, the hero-worshipper in earlier pieces speaks with some laudable misgiving, and the not less coarse and materialist Frederick, about whom no misgiving is permitted to the loyal disciple. The admiration for military methods, on condition that they are successful, for Mr. Carlyle, like Providence, is always on the side of big and victorious battalions, is the last outcome of a devotion to vigorous action and practical effect, which no verbal garniture of a transcendental kind can hinder us from perceiving to be more purely materialist and unfeignedly brutal than anything which sprung from the reviled thought of the eighteenth century.

It is instructive to remark that another of the most illustrious enemies of that century and all its works, Joseph de Maistre, had the same admiration for the effectiveness of war, and the same extreme interest and concern in the men and things of war. He, too, declares that 'the loftiest and most generous sentiments are probably to be found in the soldier;' and that war, if terrible, is divine and splendid and fascinating, the manifestation of a sublime law of the universe. We must, however, do De Maistre the justice to point out, first, that he gave a measure of his strange interest in Surgery and Judgment, as Mr. Carlyle calls it, to the public executioner, a division of the honours of social surgery which is no more than fair; while, in the second place, he redeems the brutality of the military surgical idea after a fashion, by an extraordinary mysticism, which led him to see in war a divine, inscrutable force, determining success in a manner absolutely defying all the speculations of human reason.¹ The biographer of Frederick apparently finds

(1) *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg*. 7ième Entretien.

no inscrutable force at all, but only will, tenacity, and powder kept dry. There is a vast difference between this and the absolutism of the mystic.

‘Nature,’ he says in one place, ‘keeps silently a most exact Savings-bank, and official register correct to the most evanescent item, Debtor and Creditor, in respect to one and all of us; silently marks down, Creditor by such and such an unseen act of veracity and heroism; Debtor to such a loud blustery blunder, twenty-seven million strong or one unit strong, and to all acts and words and thoughts executed in consequence of that—Debtor, Debtor, Debtor, day after day, rigorously as Fate (for this *is* Fate that is writing); and at the end of the account you will have it all to pay, my friend.’¹

That is to say, there is a law of recompense for communities of men, and as nations sow, even thus they reap. But what is Mr. Carlyle’s account of the precise nature and operation of this law? What is the original distinction between an act of veracity and a blunder? Why was the blow struck by the Directory on the Eighteenth Fructidor a blunder, and that struck by Bonaparte on the Eighteenth Brumaire a veracity? What principle of registration is that which makes Nature debtor to Frederick the Second for the seizure of Silesia, and Bonaparte debtor to Nature for ‘trampling on the world, holding it tyrannously down’? It is very well to tell us that ‘Injustice pays itself with frightful compound interest,’ but there are reasons for suspecting that Mr. Carlyle’s definition of the just and the unjust are such as to reduce this and all his other sentences of like purport to the level of mere truism and repetition. If you secretly or openly hold that to be just and veracious which is successful, then it needs no further demonstration that penalties of ultimate failure are exacted for injus-

(1) *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. No. v. p. 247.

tice, because it is precisely the failure that constitutes the injustice.

This is the kernel of all that is most retrograde in Mr. Carlyle's teaching. He identifies the physical with the moral order, confounds faithful conformity to the material conditions of success, with loyal adherence to virtuous rule and principle, and then appeals to material triumph as the sanction of nature and the ratification of high heaven. Admiring with profoundest admiration the spectacle of an inflexible will, when armed with a long-headed insight into means and quantities and forces as its instrument, and yet deeply revering the abstract ideal of justice; dazzled by the methods and the products of iron resolution, yet imbued with traditional affection for virtue; he has seen no better way of conciliating both inclinations than by insisting that they point in the same direction, and that virtue and success, justice and victory, merit and triumph, are in the long run all one and the same thing. The most fatal of confusions. Compliance with material law and condition ensures material victory, and compliance with moral condition ensures moral triumph, but then moral triumph is as often as not physical martyrdom. Superior military virtues must unquestionably win the verdict of Fate, Nature, Fact, and Veracity, on the battle-field, but what then? Has Fate no other verdicts to record than these? and at the moment while she writes Nature down debtor to the conqueror, may she not also have written her down his implacable creditor for the moral cost of his conquest?

The anarchy and confusion of Poland were an outrage upon political conditions, which brought her to dependence and ruin. The manner of the partition was an outrage on moral conditions, for which each of the nations that profited by it paid in the lawlessness of Bonaparte. The preliminaries of Léoben, again, and

Campo-Formio were the key to Waterloo and St. Helena. But Mr. Carlyle stops short at the triumph of compliance with the conditions of material victory. He is content to know that Frederick made himself master of Silesia, without considering that the day of Jena loomed in front. It suffices to say that the whiff of grapeshot on the thirteenth Vendémiaire brought Sansculottism to order and an end, without measuring what permanent elements of disorder were ineradicably implanted by resort to the military arm. Only the failures are used to point the great historical moral, and if Bonaparte had died in the Tuileries in all honour and glory, he would have ranked with Frederick or Francia as a wholly true man. Mr. Carlyle would then no more have declared the execution of Palm 'a palpable, tyrannous, murderous injustice,' than he declares it of the execution of Katte or Schlubhut. The fall of the traitor to fact, of the French monarchy, of the windbags of the first Republic, of Charles I., is improved for our edification, but then the other lesson, the failure of heroes like Cromwell, remains isolated and incoherent, with no place in a morally regulated universe. If the strength of Prussia now proves that Frederick had a right to seize Silesia, and relieves us from inquiring further whether he had any such right or not, why then should not the royalist assume, from the fact of the restoration, and the consequent obliteration of Cromwell's work, that the Protector was a usurper and a phantasm captain?

Apart from its irreconcilableness with many of his most emphatic judgments, Mr. Carlyle's doctrine about Nature's registration of the penalties of injustice is intrinsically an anachronism. It is worse than the Catholic reaction, because while De Maistre only wanted Europe to return to the system of the twelfth century, Mr. Carlyle's theory of history takes us back to times pre-historic, when might and right were the same

thing. It is decidedly natural that man in a state of nature should take and keep as much as his skill and physical strength enable him to do. But society and its benefits are all so much ground won from nature and her state. The more natural a method of acquisition, the less likely is it to be social. The essence of morality is the subjugation of nature in obedience to social needs. To use Kant's admirable description, concert *pathologically* extorted by the mere necessities of situation, is exalted into a *moral* union.¹ It is exactly in this progressive substitution of one for the other that advancement consists, that Progress of the Species at which, in certain of its forms, Mr. Carlyle has so many jibes.

That, surely, is the true test of veracity and heroism in conduct. Does your hero's achievement go in the pathological or the moral direction? Tend to spread faith in that cunning, violence, force, which were once primitive and natural conditions of life, and which will still by natural law work to their own proper triumphs in so far as these conditions survive, and within such limits, and in such sense, as they permit; or, on the contrary, does it tend to heighten respect for civic law, for pledged word, for the habit of self-surrender to the public good, and for all those other ideas and sentiments and usages which have been painfully gained from the sterile sands of egotism and selfishness, and to which we are indebted for all the untold boons conferred by the social union on man?

Viewed from this point, the manner of the achievement is as important as its immediate product, a consideration which it is one of Mr. Carlyle's most marked peculiarities to take into small account. Detesting Jesuitism from the bottom of his soul, he has been too willing to accept its fundamental maxim, that the end justifies the means. He has taken the end for the ratifica-

(1) See ante, p. 88.

tion or proscription of the means, and stamped it as the verdict of Fate and Fact on the transaction and its doer. A safer position is this, that the means prepare the end, and the end is what the means have made it. Here is the limit of the true law of the relations between man and fate. Justice and injustice in the law, let us abstain from inquiring after.

There are two sets of relations which have still to be regulated in some degree by the primitive and pathological principle of repression and main force. The first of these concern that unfortunate body of criminal and vicious persons, whose unsocial propensities are constantly straining and endangering the bonds of the social union. They exist in the midst of the most highly civilised communities, with all the predatory or violent habits of barbarous tribes. They are the active and unconquered remnant of the natural state, and it is as unscientific as the experience of some unwise philanthropy has shown it to be ineffective, to deal with them exactly as if they occupied the same moral and social level as the best of their generation. We are amply justified in employing towards them, wherever their offences endanger order, the same methods of coercion which originally made society possible. No tenable theory about free will or necessity, no theory of praise and blame that will bear positive tests, lays us under any obligation to spare either the comfort or the life of a man who indulges in certain anti-social kinds of conduct. Mr. Carlyle has done much to wear this just and austere view into the minds of his generation, and in so far he has performed an excellent service.

The second set of relations in which the pathological element still so largely predominates are those between nations. Separate and independent communities are still in a state of nature. The tie between them is only the imperfect, loose, and non-moral tie of self-interest and material power. Many pub-

licists and sentimental politicians are ever striving to conceal this displeasing fact from themselves and others, and evading the lesson of the outbreaks that now and again convulse the civilised world. Mr. Carlyle's history of the rise and progress of the power of the Prussian monarchy is the great illustration of the hold which he has got of the conception of the international state as a state of nature ; and here again, in so far as he has helped to teach us to study the past by historic methods, he has undoubtedly done laudable work.

Yet have we not to confess that there is another side to this kind of truth, in both these fields ? We may finally pronounce on a given way of thinking, only after we have discerned its goal. Not knowing this, we cannot accurately know its true tendency and direction. Now, every recognition of the pathological necessity should imply a progress and effort towards its conversion into moral relationship. The difference between a reactionary and a truly progressive thinker or group of ideas is not that the one assumes virtuousness and morality as having been the conscious condition of international dealings, while the other asserts that such dealings were the lawful consequence of self-interest and the contest of material forces ; nor is it that the one insists on viewing international transactions from the same moral point which would be the right one, if independent communities actually formed one stable and settled family, while the other declines to view their morality at all. The vital difference is, that while the reactionary writer rigorously confines his faith within the region of facts accomplished, the other anticipates a time when the endeavour of the best minds in the civilised world, co-operating with every favouring external circumstance that arises, shall have in the international circle raised moral considerations to an ever higher and higher pre-eminence, and in internal conditions shall have left in the

chances and training of the individual, ever less and less excuse or grounds for a predisposition to anti-social and barbaric moods. This hopefulness, in some shape or other, is an indispensable mark of the most valuable thought. To stop at the soldier and the gibbet, and such order as they can furnish, is to close the eyes to the entire problem of the future, and we may be sure that what omits the future is no adequate nor stable solution of the present.

Mr. Carlyle's influence, however, was at its height before this idolatry of the soldier became a paramount article in his creed ; and it is devoutly to be hoped that not many of those whom he first taught to seize before all things fact and reality, will follow him into this torrid air, where only forces and never principles are facts, and where nothing is reality but the violent triumph of arbitrarily imposed will. There was once a better side to it all, when the injunction to seek and cling to fact was a valuable warning not to waste energy and hope in seeking lights which it is not given to man ever to find, with a solemn assurance added that in frank and untrembling recognition of circumstance the spirit of man may find a priceless, ever-fruitful contentment. The prolonged and thousand-times repeated glorification of Unconsciousness, Silence, Renunciation, all comes to this : We are to leave the region of things unknowable, and hold fast to the duty that lies nearest. Here is the Everlasting Yea. In action only can we have certainty.

The reticences of men are often only less full of meaning than their most pregnant speech ; and Mr. Carlyle's unbroken silence upon the modern validity and truth of religious creeds says much. The fact that he should have taken no distinct side in the great debate as to revelation, salvation, inspiration, and the other theological issues that agitate and divide a com-

- munity where theology is now mostly verbal, has been the subject of some comment, and has had the effect of adding one rather peculiar side to the many varieties of his influence. Many in the dogmatic stage have been content to think that as he was not avowedly against them, he might be with them, and sacred persons have been known to draw their most strenuous inspirations from the chief denouncer of phantasms and exploded formulas. Only once, when speaking of Sterling's undertaking the clerical burden, does he burst out into unmistakable description of the old Jew stars that have now gone out, and wrath against those who would persuade us that these stars are still aflame and the only ones.¹ That this reserve has been wise in its day, and has most usefully widened the tide and scope of the teacher's popularity, one need not dispute. There are conditions when indirect solvents are most powerful, as there are others, which these have done much to prepare, when no lover of truth will stoop to declarations other than direct. Mr. Carlyle has assailed the dogmatic temper in religion, and this is work that goes deeper than to assail dogmas.

Not even Comte himself has harder words for metaphysics than Mr. Carlyle. 'The disease of Metaphysics' is perennial. Questions of Death and Immortality, Origin of Evil, Freedom and Necessity, are ever appearing and attempting to shape something of the universe. 'And ever unsuccessfully: for what theorem of the Infinite can the Finite render complete? . . . Metaphysical Speculation as it begins in No or Nothingness, so it must needs end in Nothingness; circulates and must circulate in endless vortices; creating, swallowing—itself.'²

(1) *Life of Sterling*. Pt. I. c. xv.

(2) *Characteristics*, Misc. Ess., iii. pp. 356-8. Rousseau in the same way makes the Savoyard Vicar declare that 'jamais le jargon de la m^{et}aphysique n'a fait découvrir une seule vérité, et il a rempli la philosophie d'absurdités dont on a honte, sitôt qu'on les dépouille de leurs grands mots.'—*Emile*, liv. iv.

Again, on the other side, he sets his face just as firmly against the excessive pretensions and unwarranted certitudes of the physicist. 'The course of Nature's phases on this our little fraction of a Planet is partially known to us: but who knows what deeper courses these depend on; what infinitely larger Cycle (of causes) our little Epicycle revolves on? To the Minnow every cranny and pebble, and quality and accident may have become familiar; but does the Minnow understand the Ocean tides and periodic Currents, the Trade-winds, and Monsoons, and Moon's Eclipses, by all which the condition of its little Creek is regulated, and may, from time to time (*unmiraculously enough*), be quite upset and reversed? Such a minnow is Man; his Creek this Planet Earth; his Ocean the immeasurable All; his Monsoons and periodic Currents the mysterious course of Providence through *Æons of Æons*.'¹ The inalterable relativity of human knowledge has never been more forcibly illustrated; and the two passages together fix the limits of that knowledge with a sagacity truly philosophic. Between the vagaries of mystics and the vagaries of physicists lies the narrow land of rational certainty, relative, conditional, experimental, from which we view the vast realm that stretches out unknown before us, and perhaps for ever unknowable; inspiring men with an elevated awe, and environing the interests and duties of their little lives with a strange sublimity. 'We emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth; then plunge again into the Inane. . . . But whence? O Heaven, whither? Sense knows not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery.'²

Natural Supernaturalism, the title of one of the cardinal chapters in Mr. Carlyle's cardinal book, is perhaps as good a

(1) *Sartor Resartus*. Bk. iii. ch. 8, p. 249.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 267.

name as another for this two-faced yet integral philosophy, which teaches us to behold with cheerful serenity the great gulf which is fixed round our faculty and existence on every side, while it fills us with that supreme sense of countless unseen possibilities, and of the hidden, undefined movements of shadow and light over the spirit, without which the soul of man falls into hard and desolate sterility. In youth, perhaps, it is the latter aspect of Mr. Carlyle's teaching which first touches people, because youth is the time of indefinite aspiration; and it is easier, besides, to surrender ourselves passively to these vague emotional impressions, than to apply actively and contentedly to the duty that lies nearest, and to the securing of 'that infinitesimallest product' on which the teacher is ever insisting. It is the Supernaturalism which stirs men first, until larger fulness of years and wider experience of life draw them to a wise and not inglorious acquiescence in Naturalism. This last is the mood which Mr. Carlyle never wearies of extolling and enjoining under the name of Belief; and the absence of it, the inability to enter into it, is that Unbelief which he so bitterly vituperates, or, in another phrase, that Discontent, which he charges with holding the soul in such desperate and paralysing bondage.

Indeed, what is it that Mr. Carlyle urges upon us but the search for that Mental Freedom, which under one name or another has been the goal and ideal of all highest minds that have reflected on the true constitution of human happiness? His often enjoined Silence is the first condition of this supreme kind of liberty, for what is silence but the absence of a self-tormenting assertiveness, the freedom from excessive susceptibility under the speech of others, one's removal from the choking sandy wilderness of wasted words? Belief is the mood which emancipates us from the paralysing dubieties of distraught

souls, and leaves us full possession of ourselves by furnishing an unshaken and inexpugnable base for action and thought, and subordinating passion to conviction. Labour, again, perhaps the cardinal article in the creed, is at once the price of moral independence, and the first condition of that fulness and accuracy of knowledge, without which we are not free, but the bounden slaves of prejudice, unreality, darkness, and error. Even Renunciation of self is in truth only the casting out of those disturbing and masterful qualities which oppress and hinder the free, natural play of the worthier parts of character. In renunciation we thus restore to self its own diviner mind.

Yet we are never bidden either to strive or hope for a freedom that is unbounded. Circumstance has fixed limits that no effort can transcend. Novalis complained in bitter words, as we know, of the mechanical, prosaic, utilitarian, cold-hearted character of *Wilhelm Meister*, constituting it an embodiment of 'artistic Atheism,' while English critics as loudly found fault with its author for being a mystic. Exactly the same discrepancy is possible in respect of Mr. Carlyle's own writings. In one sense he may be called mystic and transcendental, in another baldly mechanical and even cold-hearted, just as Novalis found Goethe to be in *Meister*. The latter impression is inevitable in all who, like Goethe and like Mr. Carlyle, make a lofty acquiescence in the positive course of circumstance a prime condition at once of wise endeavour and of genuine happiness. The splendid fire and unmeasured vehemence of Mr. Carlyle's manner partially veil the depth of this acquiescence, which is really not so far removed from fatalism. The torrent of his eloquence, bright and rushing as it is, flows between rigid banks and over hard rocks. Devotion to the heroic does not prevent the assumption of a tone towards the great mass of the unheroic, which implies that they are no more than two-legged mill

horses, ever treading a fixed and unalterable round. He practically denies other consolation to mortals than such as they may be able to get from the final and conclusive Kismet of the oriental. It is fate. Man is the creature of his destiny. As for our supposed claims on the heavenly powers, What right, he asks, hadst thou even to be? Fatalism of this stamp is the natural and unavoidable issue of a born positivity of spirit, uninformed by scientific meditation. It exists in its coarsest and most childish kind in adventurous freebooters of the type of Napoleon, and in a noble and not egotistic kind in Oliver Cromwell's pious interpretation of the order of events by the good will and providence of God.

Two conspicuous qualities of Carlylean doctrine flow from this fatalism, or poetised utilitarianism, or illumined positivity. One of them is a tolerably constant contempt for excessive nicety in moral distinctions, and an aversion to the monotonous attitude of praise and blame. In a country overrun and corroded to the heart, as Great Britain is, with cant and a foul mechanical hypocrisy, this temper ought to have had its uses in giving a much-needed robustness to public judgment. One might suppose, from the tone of opinion among us, not only that the difference between right and wrong marks the most important aspect of conduct, which would be true; but that it marks the only aspect of it that exists, or that is worth considering, which is most profoundly false. Nowhere has Puritanism done us more harm than in thus leading us to take all breadth, and colour, and diversity, and fine discrimination, out of our judgments of men, reducing them to thin, narrow, and superficial pronouncements upon the letter of their morality, or the precise conformity of their opinions to accepted standards of truth, religious or other. Among other evils which it has inflicted, this inability to conceive of conduct except as either

right or wrong, and, correspondingly in the intellectual order, of teaching except as either true or false, is at the bottom of that fatal spirit of *parti-pris* which has led to the rooting of so much injustice, disorder, immobility, and darkness in English intelligence. No excess of morality, we may be sure, has followed this excessive adoption of the exclusively moral standard. '*Quand il n'y a plus de principes dans le cœur,*' says De Sénancourt, '*on est bien scrupuleux sur les apparences publiques et sur les devoirs d'opinion.*' We have simply got for our pains a most unlovely leanness of judgment, and ever since the days when this temper set in until now, when a wholesome rebellion is afoot, it has steadily and powerfully tended to straiten character, to make action mechanical, and to impoverish art. As if there were nothing admirable in a man save unbroken obedience to the letter of the moral law, and that letter read in our own casual and local interpretation; and as if we had no faculties of sympathy, no sense for the beauty of character, no feeling for broad force and full-pulsing vitality.

To study manners and conduct and men's moral nature in such a way, is as direct an error as it would be to overlook in the study of his body everything except its vertebral column and the bony framework. The body is more than a mere anatomy. A character is much else besides being virtuous or vicious. In many of the characters in which some of the finest and most singular qualities of humanity would seem to have reached their furthest height, their morality was the side least worth discussing. The same may be said of the specific rightness or wrongness of opinion in the intellectual order. Let us condemn error or immorality, when the scope of our criticism calls for this particular function, but why rush to praise or blame, to eulogy or reprobation, when we should do better simply to explore and enjoy? Moral imperfection is

ever a grievous curtailment of life, but many exquisite flowers of character, many gracious and potent things, may still thrive in the most disordered scene.

The vast waste which this limitation of prospect entails is the most grievous rejection of moral treasure, if it be true that nothing enriches the nature like wide sympathy and many-coloured appreciativeness. To a man like Macaulay, for example, criticism was only a tribunal before which men were brought to be decisively tried by one or two inflexible tests, and then sent to join the sheep on the one hand, or the goats on the other. His pages are the record of sentences passed, not the presentation of human characters in all their fulness and colour; and the consequence is that even now and so soon, in spite of all their rhetorical brilliance, their hold on men has grown slack. Contrast the dim depths into which his essay on Johnson is receding, with the vitality as of a fine dramatic creation which exists in Mr. Carlyle's essay on the same man. Mr. Carlyle knows as well as Macaulay how blind and stupid a creed was English Toryism a century ago, but he seizes and reproduces the character of his man, and this was much more than a matter of a creed. So with Burns. He was drunken and unchaste and thriftless, and Mr. Carlyle holds all these vices as deeply in reprobation as if he had written ten thousand sermons against them; but he leaves the fulmination to the hack moralist of the pulpit or the press, with whom words are cheap, easily gotten, and readily thrown forth. To him it seems better worth while, having made sure of some sterling sincerity and rare genuineness of vision and singular human quality, to dwell on, and do justice to that, than to accumulate common-places as to the viciousness of vice. Here we may perhaps find the explanation of the remarkable fact that though Mr. Carlyle has written about a large number of men of all varieties of

opinion and temperament, and written with emphasis and point and strong feeling, yet there is hardly one of these judgments, however much we may dissent from it, which we could fairly put a finger upon as indecently absurd or futile. Of how many writers of thirty volumes can we say the same ?

That this broad and poetic temper of criticism has special dangers, and needs to have special safeguards, is but too true. Even, however, if we find that it has its excesses, we may forgive much to the merits of a reaction against a system which has raised monstrous floods of sour cant round about us, and hardened the hearts and parched the sympathies of men by blasts from theological deserts. There is a point of view so lofty and so peculiar that from it we are able to discern in men and women something more than and apart from creed, and profession, and formulated principle ; which indeed directs and colours this creed and principle as decisively as it is in its turn acted on by them, and this is their character or humanity. The least important thing about Johnson is that he was a Tory ; and about Burns, that he drank too much and was incontinent ; and if we see in modern literature an increasing tendency to mount to this higher point of view, this humaner prospect, there is no living writer to whom we owe more for it than Mr. Carlyle. The same principle which revealed the valour and godliness of Puritanism, has proved its most efficacious solvent, for it places character on the pedestal where Puritanism places dogma.

The second of the qualities which seem to flow from Mr. Carlyle's fatalism, and one much less useful among such a people as the English, is a deficiency of sympathy with masses of men. It would be easy enough to find places where he talks of the dumb millions in terms of fine and sincere humanity, and his feeling for the common pathos of the human

lot, as he encounters it in individual lives, is as earnest and as simple, as it is invariably lovely and touching in its expression. But detached passages cannot counterbalance the effect of a whole compact body of teaching. The multitude stands between Destiny on the one side, and the Hero on the other; a sport to the first, and as potter's clay to the second. '*Dogs, would ye then live for ever?*' Frederick cried to a troop who hesitated to attack a battery vomiting forth death and destruction. This is a measure of Mr. Carlyle's own valuation of the store we ought to set on the lives of the most. We know in what coarse outcome such an estimate of the dignity of other life than the life heroic has practically issued; in what barbarous vindication of barbarous law-breaking in Jamaica, in what inhuman softness for slavery, in what contemptuous and angry words for 'Beales and his 50,000 Roughs,' contrasted with gentle words for our precious aristocracy, with 'the politest and gracefullest kind of woman' to wife. Here is the end of the Eternal Verities, when one lets them bulk so big in his eyes as to shut out that perishable speck, the human race.

'They seem to have seen, these brave old Northmen,' he says in one place, 'what Meditation has taught all men in all ages, that this world is after all but a show—a phenomenon or appearance, no real thing. All deep souls see into that.'¹ Yes; but deep souls dealing with the practical questions of society, do well to thrust the vision as far from them as they can, and to suppose that this world is no show, and happiness and misery not mere appearances, but the keenest realities that we can know. The difference between virtue and vice, between wisdom and folly, is only phenomenal, yet there is difference enough. '*What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue,*' Burke cried in the presence of an affecting incident. Yet the consciousness

(1) *Hero-Worship*, p. 43.

of this made him none the less careful, minute, patient, systematic, in examining a policy, or criticising a tax. Mr. Carlyle, on the contrary, falls back on the same reflection for comfort in the face of political confusions and difficulties and details, which he has not the moral patience to encounter scientifically. Unable to dream of swift renovation and wisdom among men, he ponders on the unreality of life, and hardens his heart against generations that will not know the things that pertain unto their peace. He answers to one lifting up some moderate voice of protest in favour of the masses of mankind, as his Prussian hero did, '*Ah, you do not know that damned race.*'

There is no passage which Mr. Carlyle so often quotes as the sublime—

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on ; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

If the ever present impression of this awful, most moving, yet most soothing thought, be a law of spiritual breadth and height, there is still a peril in it. Such an impression may inform the soul with a devout mingled sense of grandeur and nothingness, or it may blacken into cynicism and antinomian living for self and the day. It may be a solemn and holy refrain, sounding far off but clear in the dusty course of work and duty ; or it may be the comforting chorus of a diabolic drama of selfishness and violence. As a reaction against religious theories, which make humanity over-abound in self-consequence, and fill individuals with the strutting importance of creatures with private souls to save or lose, even such cynicism as Byron's was wholesome and nearly forgivable. Nevertheless, the most important question that we can ask of any great teacher, as of the walk and conversation of any commonest person, remains this, how far has he strengthened and raised the conscious and harmonious

dignity of humanity ; how stirred in men and women, many or few, deeper and more active sense of the worth and obligation and innumerable possibilities, not of their own little lives, one or another, but of life collectively ; how heightened the self-respect of the race ? There is no need to plant oneself in a fool's paradise, with no eye for the weakness of men, the futility of their hopes, the irony of their fate, the dominion of the satyr and the tiger in their hearts. Laughter has a fore-place in life. All this we may see and show that we see, and yet so throw it behind the weightier facts of nobleness and sacrifice, of the boundless gifts which fraternal union has given, and has the power of giving, as to kindle in every breast, not callous to exalted impressions, the glow of sympathetic endeavour, and of serene exultation in the bond that makes 'precious the soul of man to man.'

This renewal of moral energy by spiritual contact with the mass of men, and by meditation on the destinies of mankind, is the very reverse of Mr. Carlyle's method. With him, it is good to leave the mass, and fall down before the individual, and be saved by him. The victorious hero is the true Paraclete. 'Nothing so lifts a man from all his mean imprisonments, were it but for moments, as true admiration.' And this is really the kernel of the Carlylean doctrine. The whole human race toils and moils, straining and energizing, doing and suffering things multitudinous and unspeakable under the sun, in order that like the aloe-tree it may once in a hundred years produce a flower. It is this hero that age offers to age, and the wisest worship him. Time and nature once and again distil from out of the lees and froth of common humanity some wondrous character, of a potent and reviving property hardly short of miraculous. This the man who knows his own good cherishes in his inmost soul as a sacred thing, an elixir of moral life.

The Great Man is 'the light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; a flowing light fountain, in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them.' This is only another form of the anthropomorphic conceptions of deity. The divinity of the ordinary hierophant is clothed in the minds of the worshippers with the highest human qualities they happen to be capable of conceiving, and this is the self-acting machinery by which worship refreshes and recruits what is best in man. Mr. Carlyle has another way. He carries the process a step further, giving back to the great man what had been taken for beings greater than any man, and summoning us to trim the lamp of endeavour at the shrine of heroic chiefs of mankind. In that house there are many mansions, the boisterous sanctuary of a vagabond polytheism. But each altar is individual and apart, and the reaction of this isolation upon the egotistic instincts of the worshipper has been only too evident. It is good for us to build temples to great names which recall special transfigurations of humanity; but it is better still, it gives a firmer nerve to purpose and adds a finer holiness to the ethical sense, to carry ever with us the unmarked, yet living tradition of the voiceless, unconscious effort of unnumbered millions of souls, flitting lightly away like showers of thin leaves, yet ever augmenting the elements of perfectness in man, and exalting the eternal contest.

Mr. Carlyle has indeed written that generation stands indissolubly woven with generation; 'how we inherit, not Life only, but all the garniture and form of Life, and work and speak, and even think and feel, as our fathers and primeval grandfathers from the beginning have given it to us;' how 'mankind is a living, indivisible whole.'¹ Even this, however, with the 'literal communion of saints,' which follows in connection with

(1) *Organic Filaments* in the *Sartor*, Bk. iii. c. 7.

it, is only a detached suggestion, not incorporated with the body of the writer's doctrine. It does not neutralise the general lack of faith in the cultivable virtue of masses of men, nor the universal tone of humoristic cynicism with which all but a little band, the supposed salt of the earth, are treated. Man is for Mr. Carlyle, as for the Calvinistic theologian, a fallen and depraved being, without much hope, except for a few of the elect. The best thing that can happen to the poor creature is, that he should be thoroughly well drilled. In other words, society does not really progress in its bulk; and the methods which were conditions of the original formation and growth of the social union, remain indispensable until the sound of the last trump. Was there not a profound and far-reaching truth wrapped up in Goethe's simple yet really inexhaustible monition, that if we would improve a man, it were well to let him believe that we already think him that which we would have him to be. The law that *noblesse oblige* has unwritten bearings in dealing with all men; all masses of men are susceptible of an appeal from that point: for this Mr. Carlyle seems to make no allowance.

Every modification of society is one of the slow growths of time, and to hurry impatiently after them by swift ways of military discipline and peremptory law-making, is only to clasp the near and superficial good. It is easy to make a solitude and call it peace, to plant an iron heel and call it order. But read Mr. Carlyle's essay on Dr. Francia, and then ponder the history of Paraguay for these later years, and the accounts of its condition in the newspapers of to-day. 'Nay, it may be,' we learn from that remarkable piece, 'that the benefit of him is not even yet exhausted, even yet entirely become visible. Who knows but, in unborn centuries, Paragueno men will look back to their lean iron Francia, as men do in such cases to the

one veracious person, and institute considerations?'¹ Who knows, indeed, if only it prove that their lean iron Francia, in his passion for order and authority, did not stamp out the very life of the nation? Where organic growths are concerned, patience is the sovereign law; and where the organism is a society of men, the vital principle is a sense in one shape or another of the dignity of humanity. The recognition of this tests the distinction between the truly heroic ruler of the stamp of Cromwell, and the arbitrary enthusiast for external order, like Frederick. Yet in more than one place Mr. Carlyle accepts the fundamental principle of democracy. 'It is curious to consider now,' he says once, 'with what fierce, deep-breathed doggedness the poor English Nation, drawn by their instincts, held fast upon it [the Spanish War of Walpole's time, in Jenkins's Ear Question], and would take no denial of it, as if they had surmised and seen. For the instincts of simple, guileless persons (liable to be counted stupid by the unwary) Jenkins's are sometimes of prophetic nature, and spring from the deep places of this universe!'² If the writer of this had only thought it out to the end, and applied the conclusions thereof to history and politics, what a difference it would have made.

No criticism upon either Mr. Carlyle or any other modern historian, possessed of speculative quality, would be in any sense complete, which should leave out of sight his view of the manner and significance of the break-up of the old European structure. The historian is pretty sure to be guided in his estimate of the forces which have contributed to dissolution in the past, by the kind of anticipation which he entertains of the probable course of reconstruction. Like Comte, in his ideas of temporal reconstruction, Mr. Carlyle goes back to something

(1) *Misc. Ess.*, vi. 124.

(2) *Frederick*, iv. 390.

like the forms of feudalism for the model of the industrial organisation of the future; but in the spiritual order he is as far removed as possible from any semblance of that revival of the old ecclesiastical forms without the old theological ideas, which is the corner-stone of Comte's edifice. To the question whether mankind gained or lost by the French Revolution, Mr. Carlyle nowhere gives a clear answer; indeed, on this subject more even than any other, he clings closely to his favourite method of simple presentation, streaked with dramatic irony. No writer shows himself more alive to the enormous moment to all Europe of that transaction; but we hear no word from him on the question whether we have more reason to bless or curse an event that interrupted, either subsequently to retard or to accelerate, the transformation of the West from a state of war, of many degrees of social subordination, of religious privilege, of aristocratic administration, into a state of peaceful industry, of equal international rights, of social equality, of free and equal tolerance of creeds. That this process was going on prior to 1789 is undeniable. Are we really nearer to the permanent establishment of the new order, for what was done between 1789 and 1793? or were men thrown off the right track of improvement, by a movement which turned exclusively on abstract rights, which dealt with men's ideas and habits as if they were instantaneously pliable before the aspirations of any government, and which by its violent and inconsiderate methods drove all those who should only have been friends of order into being the enemies of progress as well? There are many able and honest and republican men who in their hearts suspect that the latter of the two alternatives is the more correct description of what has happened. Mr. Carlyle is as one who does not hear the question. He draws its general moral lesson from the French Revolution,

and with clangorous note warns all whom it concerns, from king to churl, that imposture must come to an end. But for the precise amount and kind of dissolution which the West owes to it, for the political meaning of it, as distinguished from its moral or its dramatic significance, we seek in vain, finding no word on the subject, nor even evidence of consciousness that such word is needed.

The truth is that with Mr. Carlyle the Revolution begins, not in 1789, but in 1741; not with the Fall of the Bastille, but with the Battle of Mollwitz. This earliest of Frederick's victories was the first sign 'that indeed a new hour had struck on the Time Horologe, that a new Epoch had arisen. Slumberous Europe, rotting amid its blind pedantries, its lazy hypocrisies, conscious and unconscious: this man is capable of shaking it a little out of its stupid refuges of lies, and ignominious wrap-pages, and of intimating to it afar off that there is still a Veracity in Things, and a Mendacity in Sham Things,' and so forth, in the well-known strain.¹ It is impossible to overrate the truly supreme importance of the violent break-up of Europe which followed the death of the Emperor Charles VI., and in many respects 1740 is as important a date in the history of Western societies as 1789. Most of us would probably find the importance of this epoch in its destructive contribution, rather than in that constructive and moral quality which lay under the movement of '89. The Empire was thoroughly shattered. France was left weak, impoverished, humiliated. Spain was finally thrust from among the efficient elements in the European State-system. Most important of all, their too slight sanctity had utterly left the old conceptions of public law and international right. The whole polity of Europe was left in such a condition of disruption as had not been equalled since the death of Charles

(1) *History of Frederick the Great*, iv. 328. See also vol. i., *Proem*.

the Great. The Partition of Poland was the most startling evidence of the completeness of this disruption, and if one statesman was more to be praised or blamed for shaking over the fabric than another, that statesman was Frederick the Second of Prussia. But then, in Mr. Carlyle's belief, there was equally a constructive and highly moral side to all this. The old fell to pieces because it was internally rotten. The gospel of the new was that the government of men and kingdoms is a business beyond all others demanding an open-eyed accessibility to all facts and realities; that here more than anywhere else you need to give the tools to him who can handle them; that government does by no means go on of itself, but more than anything else in this world demands skill, patience, energy, long and tenacious grip, and the constant presence of that most indispensable, yet most rare, of all practical convictions, that the effect is the inevitable consequent of the cause. Here was a revolution, we cannot doubt. The French Revolution was in a manner a complement to it, as Mr. Carlyle himself says in a place where he talks of believing both in the French Revolution and in Frederick; 'that is to say both that Real Kingship is eternally indispensable, and also that the destruction of Sham Kingship (a frightful process) is occasionally so.'¹ It is curious that an observer who could see the positive side of Frederick's disruption of Europe in 1740, did not also see that there was a positive side to the disruption of the French monarchy fifty years afterwards, and that not only was a blow dealt to sham kingship, but a decisive impulse was given to those ideas of morality and justice in government, upon which only real kingship in whatever form is able to rest.

As to the other great factor in the dissolution of the old

(1) *Frederick the Great*, i. 9.

state, the decay of ancient spiritual forms, Mr. Carlyle gives no uncertain sound. Of the Reformation, as of the French Revolution, philosophers have doubted how far it really contributed to the stable progress of European civilisation. Would it have been better, if it had been possible, for the old belief gradually as by process of nature to fall to pieces, new doctrine as gradually and as normally emerging from the ground of disorganised and decayed convictions, without any of that frightful violence which stirred men's deepest passions, and gave them a sinister interest in holding one or other of the rival creeds in its most extreme, exclusive, and intolerant form? This question Mr. Carlyle does not see, or, if he does see it, he rides roughshod over it. Every reader remembers the notable passage in which he declares that the question of Protestant or not Protestant meant everywhere, 'Is there anything of nobleness in you, O Nation, or is there nothing?' and that afterwards it fared with nations as they did, or did not, accept this sixteenth century form of Truth, when it came.¹

France, for example, is the conspicuous proof of what overtook the deniers. 'France saw good to massacre Protestantism, and end it in the night of St. Bartholomew, 1572. The celestial apparitor of heaven's chancery, so we may speak, the Genius of Fact and Veracity, had left his writ of summons; writ was read and replied to in this manner.' But let us look at this more definitely. A complex series of historic facts do not usually fit so neatly into the moral formula. The truth surely is that while the anxieties and dangers of the Catholic party in France increased after St. Bartholomew, whose dramatic horror has made its historic importance to be vastly exaggerated, the Protestant cause remained full of vitality, and the number of its adherents went on increasing until the Edict of Nantes. It

(1) *Frederick*, i. Bk. III. Ch. viii. 269—274.

is eminently unreasonable to talk of France seeing good to end Protestantism in a night, when we reflect that twenty-six years after, the provisions of the Edict of Nantes were what they were. 'By that Edict,' the historian tells us, 'the French Protestants, who numbered perhaps a tenth of the total population, 2,000,000 out of 20,000,000, obtained absolute liberty of conscience; performance of public worship in 3,500 castles, as well as in certain specified houses in each province; a State endowment equal to £20,000 a year; civil rights equal in every respect to those of the Catholics; admission to the public colleges, hospitals, &c.; finally, eligibility to all offices of State.' It was this, and not the Massacre, which was France's reply to the Genius of Fact and Veracity. Again, on the other side, England accepted Protestantism, and yet Mr. Carlyle of all men can hardly pretend, after his memorable deliverances in the *Niagara*, that he thinks she has fared particularly well in consequence.

The famous diatribe against Jesuitism in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*,¹ one of the most unfeignedly coarse and virulent bits of invective in the language, points plumb in the same direction. It is grossly unjust, because it takes for granted that Loyola and all Jesuits were deliberately conscious of imposture and falsehood, knowingly embraced the cause of Beelzebub, and resolutely propagated it. It is one thing to judge a system in its corruption, and a quite other thing to measure the worth and true design of its first founders; one thing to estimate the intention and sincerity of a movement, when it first stirred the hearts of men, and another thing to pass sentence upon it in the days of its degradation. The vileness into which Jesuitism eventually sank is a poor reason why we should malign and curse those, who, centuries before, found in the rules and discipline and

(1) No. VIII. pp. 353—371.

aims of that system an acceptable expression for their own disinterested social aspirations. It is childish to say that the subsequent vileness is a proof of the existence of an inherent corrupt principle from the beginning, because hitherto certainly, and probably it will be so for ever, even the most salutary movements and most effective social conceptions have been provisional. In other words, the ultimate certainty of dissolution does not nullify the beauty and strength of physical life, and the putrescence of Jesuit methods and ideas is no more a reproach to those who first found succour in them, than the cant and formalism of any other degenerate form of active faith, say monachism or Calvinism, prove Calvin or Benedict or Bernard to have been hypocritical and hollow. To be able, however, to take this reasonable view, one must be unable to believe that men can be drawn for generation after generation by such a mere hollow lie and villany and 'light of hell' as Jesuitism has always been, according to Mr. Carlyle's rendering. Human nature is not led for so long by lies; and if it seems to be otherwise, let us be sure that ideas, which do lead and attract successive generations of men to self-sacrifice and care for social interests, must contain something which is not wholly a lie.

Perhaps it is pertinent to remember that Mr. Carlyle, in fact, is a prophet with a faith, and he holds the opposition kind of religionist in a peculiarly theological execration. In spite of his passion for order, he cannot understand the political point of view. The attempts of good men in epochs of disorder to re-make the past, to bring back an old spiritual system and method, because that did once at any rate give shelter to mankind, and peradventure may give it to them again until better times come, are phenomena into which he cannot look with calm or patience. The great

reactionist is a type that is wholly dark to him. That a reactionist can be great, can be a lover of virtue and truth, can in any sort contribute to the welfare of men, these are possibilities to which he will lend no ear. In a word, he is a prophet and not a philosopher, and it is fruitless to go to him for help in the solution of philosophic problems. This is not to say that he may not render us much help in those far more momentous problems, which affect the guidance of our own lives.

BYRON.

BYRON.

IT is one of the singular facts in the history of literature, that the most rootedly conservative country in Europe should have produced the poet of the Revolution. Nowhere is the antipathy to principles and ideas so profound, nor the addiction to moderate compromise so inveterate, nor the reluctance to advance away from the past so unconquerable, as in England; and nowhere in England is there so settled an indisposition to regard any thought or sentiment except in the light of an existing social order, nor so firmly passive a hostility to generous aspirations, as in the aristocracy. Yet it was precisely an English aristocrat who became the favourite poet of all the most high-minded conspirators and socialists of continental Europe for half a century; of the best of those, that is to say, who have borne the most unsparing testimony against the present ordering of society, and against the theological and moral conceptions which have guided and maintained it. The rank and file of the army has been equally inspired by the same fiery and rebellious strains against the order of God and the order of man. 'The day will come,' wrote Mazzini, thirty years ago, 'when Democracy will remember all that it owes to Byron. England, too, will, I hope, one day remember the mission—so entirely English, yet hitherto overlooked by her—which Byron fulfilled on the Continent; the European rôle given by him to English literature, and the appreciation and sympathy for England which he awakened amongst us. Before he came, all that was known of English literature was the

French translation of Shakespeare, and the anathema hurled by Voltaire against the "intoxicated barbarian." It is since Byron that we Continentalists have learned to study Shakespeare and other English writers. From him dates the sympathy of all the true-hearted amongst us for this land of liberty, whose true vocation he so worthily represented among the oppressed. He led the genius of Britain on a pilgrimage throughout all Europe.'¹

The day of recollection has not yet come. It is only in his own country that Byron's influence has been a comparatively superficial one, and its scope and gist dimly and imperfectly caught, because it is only in England that the partisans of order hope to mitigate or avoid the facts of the Revolution by pretending not to see them, while the friends of progress suppose that all the fruits of change shall inevitably fall, if only they keep the forces and processes and extent of the change rigorously private and undeclared. That intense practicalness, which seems to have done so many great things for us, and yet at the same moment mysteriously to have robbed us of all, forbids us even to cast a glance at what is no more than an aspiration. Englishmen like to be able to answer about the Revolution as those ancients answered about the symbol of another Revolution, when they said that they knew not so much as whether there were a Holy Ghost or not. The same want of kindling power in the national intelligence which made of the English Reformation one of the most sluggish

(1) See also George Sand's Preface to *Obermann*, p. 10. 'En même temps que les institutions et les coutumes, la littérature anglaise passa le détroit, et vint regner chez nous. La poésie britannique nous révéla le doute incarné sous la figure de Byron; puis la littérature allemande, quoique plus mystique, nous conduisit au même résultat par un sentiment de rêverie plus profond.'

The number of translations that have appeared in Germany since 1830 proves the coincidence of Byronic influence with revolutionary movement in that country.

and tedious chapters in our history, has made the still mightier advance of the moderns from the social system and spiritual bases of the old state, in spite of our two national achievements of punishing a king with death and emancipating our slaves, just as unimpressive and semi-efficacious a performance in this country, as the more affrontingly hollow and halt-footed transactions of the sixteenth century.

Just because it was wonderful that England should have produced Byron, it would have been wonderful if she had received any permanently deep impression from him, or preserved a lasting appreciation of his work, or cheerfully and intelligently recognised his immense force. And accordingly we cannot help perceiving that generations are arising who know not Byron. This is not to say that he goes unread; but there is a vast gulf fixed between the author whom we read with pleasure and even delight, and that other to whom we turn at all moments for inspiration and encouragement, and whose words and ideas spring up incessantly and animatingly within us, unbidden, whether we turn to him or no.

For no Englishman now does Byron hold this highest place, and this is not unnatural in any way, if we remember in what a different shape the Revolution has now by change of circumstance and occasion come to present itself to those who are most ardent in the search after new paths. An estimate of Byron would be in some sort a measure of the distance that we have travelled within the last half century in our appreciation of the conditions of social change. The modern rebel is at least half acquiescence. He has developed a historic sense. The most hearty aversion to the prolonged reign of some of the old gods does not hinder him from seeing, that what are now frigid and unlovely blocks were full of vitality and light in days before the era of their petrification. There is much less

eagerness of praise or blame, and much less faith in knife and cautery, less confidence that new and right growth will naturally and necessarily follow upon demolition.

The Revolution has never had that long hold on the national imagination in England, either as an idol or a bugbear, which is essential to keep the poet who sings it in effective harmony with new generations of readers. More than this, the Byronic conception was as transitional and inadequate as the methods and ideas of the practical movers, who were to a man left stranded in every country in Europe, during the period of his poetic activity. A transitional and unstable movement of society inevitably fails to supply a propulsion powerful enough to make its poetic expression eternal. There is no better proof of the enormous force of Byron's genius than that it was able to produce so fine an expression, of elements so intrinsically unfavourable to high poetry as doubt, denial, antagonism, and weariness. But this force was no guarantee for perpetuity of influence. Bare rebellion cannot endure, and no succession of generations can continue nourishing themselves on the poetry of complaint, and the idealisation of revolt. If, however, it is impossible that Byron should be all to us that he was to a former generation, and if we find no direct guidance in his muse, this is no reason why criticism should pass him over, nor why there may not be something peculiarly valuable in the noble freedom and genuine modernism of his poetic spirit, to an age that is apparently only forsaking the clerical idyll of one school, for the reactionary mediævalism or paganism, intrinsically meaningless and issueless, of another.

More attention is now paid to the mysteries of Byron's life than to the merits of his work, and criticism and morality are equally injured by the confusion between the worth of the verse he wrote, and the virtue or wickedness of the life he lived. The

admirers of his poetry appear sensible of some obligation to be the champions of his conduct, while those who have diligently gathered together the details of an accurate knowledge of the unseemliness of his conduct, cannot bear to think that from this bramble men have been able to gather figs. The result of the confusion has been that grave men and women have applied themselves to investigate and judge Byron's private life, as if the exact manner of it, the more or less of his outrages upon decorum, the degree of the deadness of his sense of moral responsibility, were matter of minute and profound interest to all ages. As if all this had anything to do with criticism proper. It is right that we should know the life and manners of one whom we choose for a friend, or of one who asks us to entrust him with the control of public interests. In either of these two cases, we need a guarantee for present and future. Art knows nothing of guarantees. The work is before us, its own warranty. What is it to us whether Turner had coarse orgies with the trulls of Wapping? We can judge his art without knowing or thinking of the artist. And in the same way, what are the stories of Byron's libertinism to us? They may have biographical interest, but of critical interest hardly the least. If the name of the author of *Manfred*, *Cain*, *Childe Harold*, were already lost, as it may be in remote times, the work abides, and its mark on European opinion.

There is a sense in which biographical detail gives light to criticism, but not the sense in which the prurient moralist uses or seeks it. The life of the poet may help to explain the growth and prominence of a characteristic sentiment or peculiar idea. Knowledge of this or that fact in his life may uncover the roots of something that strikes, or unravel something that perplexes us. Considering the relations between a man's character and circumstance, and what he produces, we can from

this point of view hardly know too much as to the personality of a great writer. Only let us recollect that this personality manifests itself outwardly in two separate forms, in conduct, and in literary production, and that each of these manifestations is to be judged independently of the other. If one of them is wholly censurable, the other may still be the outcome of the better mind; and even from the purely biographical aspect, it is a plain injustice to insist on identifying a character with its worse expression only.

Poetry, and not only poetry, but every other channel of emotional expression and æsthetic culture, confessedly moves with the general march of the human mind, and art is only the transformation into ideal and imaginative shapes of a predominant system and philosophy of life. Minor verse-writers may fairly be consigned, without disrespect, to the region of the literature of taste; and criticism of their work takes the shape of a discussion of stray graces, of new turns, of little variations of shade and colour, of their conformity to the accepted rules that constitute the technics of poetry. The loftier masters, though their technical power and originality, their beauty of form, strength of flight, music and variousness of rhythm, are all full of interest and instruction, yet, besides these precious gifts, come to us with the size and quality of great historic forces, for they represent the hope and energies, the dreams and the consummation, of the human intelligence in its most enormous movements. To appreciate one of these, we need to survey it on every side. For these we need synthetic criticism, which, after analysis has done its work, and disclosed to us the peculiar qualities of form, conception, and treatment, shall collect the products of this first process, construct for us the poet's mental figure in its integrity and just

coherence, and then finally, as the sum of its work, shall trace the relations of the poet's ideas, either direct or indirect, through the central currents of thought, to the visible tendencies of an existing age.

The greatest poets reflect beside all else the broad-bosomed haven of a perfect and positive faith, in which mankind has for some space found shelter, unsuspicious of the new and distant wayfarings that are ever in store. To this band of sacred bards few are called, while perhaps not more than four high names would fill the list of the chosen : Dante, the poet of Catholicism ; Shakespeare, of Feudalism ; Milton, of Protestantism ; Goethe, of that new faith which is as yet without any universally recognised label, but whose heaven is an ever-closer harmony between the consciousness of man and all the natural forces of the universe ; whose liturgy is culture, and whose deity is a certain high composure of the human heart.

The far-shining pre-eminence of Shakespeare, apart from the incomparable fertility and depth of his natural gifts, arises secondarily from the larger extent to which he transcended the special forming influences, and refreshed his fancy and widened his range of sympathy, by recourse to what was then the nearest possible approach to a historic or political method. To the poet, vision reveals a certain form of the truth, which the rest of men laboriously discover, and prove by the tardier methods of meditation and science. Shakespeare did not walk in imagination with the great warriors, monarchs, churchmen, and rulers of history, conceive their conduct, ideas, schemes, and throw himself into their words and actions, without strengthening that original taste which must have first drawn him to historical subjects, and without deepening both his feeling for the great progression of human affairs, and his sympathy for those relative moods of surveying and dealing with

them, which are not more positive, scientific, and political, than they may be made truly poetic.

Again, while in Dante the inspiring force was spiritual, and in Goethe it was intellectual, we may say that both in Shakespeare and Milton it was political and social. In other words, with these two, the drama of the one and the epic of the other were each of them connected with ideas of government and the other external movements of men in society, and with the play of the sentiments which spring from them. We assuredly do not mean that in either of them, least of all in Shakespeare, there is an absence of the spiritual element. This would be at once to thrust them down into a lower place; for the spiritual is of the very essence of poetry. But with the spiritual there mixes in our Englishmen a most abundant leaven of recognition of the impressions and impulses of the outer forms of life, as well as of active sympathy with the every-day debate of the world. They are neither of them inferior to the highest in sense of the wide and unutterable things of the spirit; yet with both of them, more than with other poets of the same rank, the man with whose soul and circumstance they have to deal is the πολιτικὸν ζῶον, no high abstraction of the race, but the creature with concrete relations and a full objective life. In Shakespeare the dramatic form helps partly to make this more prominent, though the poet's spirit shines forth thus, independently of the mould which it imposes on itself. Of Milton we may say, too, that, in spite of the supernatural machinery of his greatest poem, it bears strongly impressed on it the political mark, and that in those minor pieces, where he is avowedly in the political sphere, he still rises to the full height of his majestic harmony and noblest dignity.

Byron was touched by the same fire. The contemporary

and friend of the most truly spiritual of all English poets, Shelley, he was himself among the most essentially political. Or perhaps one will be better understood, describing his quality as a quality of poetical *worldliness*, in its enlarged and generous sense of energetic interest in real transactions, and a capacity of being moved and raised by them into those lofty moods of emotion, which in more spiritual natures are only kindled by contemplation of the vast infinitudes that compass the human soul round about. That Shelley was immeasurably superior to Byron in all the rarer qualities of the specially poetic mind appears to us so unmistakably assured a fact, that difference of opinion upon it can only spring from a more fundamental difference of opinion as to what it is that constitutes this specially poetic quality. If more than anything else it consists in the power of transfiguring action, character, and thought, in the serene radiance of the purest imaginative intelligence, and the gift of expressing these transformed products in the finest articulate vibrations of emotional speech, then must we not confess that Byron has composed no piece which from this point may compare with *Prometheus* or the *Cenci*, any more than Rubens may take his place with Titian? We feel that Shelley transports the spirit to the highest bound and limit of the intelligible; and that with him thought passes through one superadded and more rarefying process than the other poet is master of. If it be true, as has been written, that 'Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge,' we may say that Shelley teaches us to apprehend that further something, the breath and finer spirit of poetry itself. Contrasting, for example, Shelley's Ode to the West Wind with the famous and truly noble stanzas on the eternal sea which close the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, who does not feel that there is in the first a volatile and unseizable element that is

quite distinct from the imagination and force and high impressiveness, or from any indefinable product of all of these united, which form the glory and power of the second? We may ask in the same way whether *Manfred*, where the spiritual element is as predominant as it ever is in Byron, is worth half a page of *Prometheus*.

To perceive and admit this is not to disparage Byron's achievements. To be most deeply penetrated with the differentiating quality of the poet, is not, after all, to contain the whole of that admixture of varying and moderating elements, which goes to the composition of the broadest and most effective work. Of these elements, Shelley, with all his rare gifts of spiritual imagination and winged melodiousness of verse, was markedly wanting in a keen and omnipresent feeling for the course of human events. All nature stirred him, except the consummating crown of natural growth.

We do not mean anything so untrue as that Shelley was wanting either in deep humanity or in active benevolence, or that social injustice was a thing indifferent to him. I do not forget the energetic political propagandism of his youth in Ireland and elsewhere. Many a furious stanza remains to show how deeply and bitterly the spectacle of this injustice burnt into his soul. But these pieces are accidents. They do not belong to the immortal part of his work. An American original, unconsciously bringing the revolutionary mind to the climax of all utterances possible to it, has said that 'men are degraded when considered as the members of a political organisation.'¹ Shelley's position was on a yet more remote pinnacle than this. Of mankind he was barely conscious, in his loftiest and divinest flights. His muse seeks the vague translucent spaces, where the care of man melts away in vision of the eternal forces,

(1) Thoreau.

of which man may be but the fortuitous manifestation of an hour.

Byron, on the other hand, is never moved by the strength of his passion or the depth of his contemplation quite away from the round earth, and the civil animal who dwells upon it. Even his misanthropy is only an inverted form of social solicitude. His practical zeal for good and noble causes might teach us this. He never grudged either money or time or personal peril for the cause of Italian freedom, and his life was the measure and the cost of his interest in the liberty of Greece. Then again he was full not merely of wit, which is sometimes only an affair of the tongue, but of humour also, which goes much deeper; and it is of the essence of the humoristic nature, that whether sunny or saturnine, it binds the thoughts of him who possesses it to the wide medley of expressly human things. Byron did not misknow himself, nor misapprehend the most marked turn of his own character, when he wrote the lines :—

I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the universe and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

It was this which made Byron a social force, a far greater force than Shelley either has been or can be. Men read in each page that he was one of like passions with themselves; that he had their own feet of clay, if he had other members of brass and gold and fine silver which they had none of; and that vehement sensibility, tenacious energy of imagination, a bounding swell of poetic fancy, had not obliterated, but had rather quickened, the sense of the highest kind of man of the world, which did not decay but waxed stronger in him with years. His openness to beauty and care for it were always

inferior in keenness and in hold upon him to his sense of human interest, and the superiority in certain respects of *Marino Faliero*, for example, where he handles a social theme in a worthy spirit, over *Manfred*, where he seeks a something tumultuously beautiful, is due to that subordination in his mind of æsthetic to social intention, which is one of the most strongly distinctive marks of the truly modern spirit. The admirable wit both of his letters, and of pieces like the *Vision of Judgment* and *Don Juan*, where wit reaches as high as any English writer has ever carried it, shows in another way the same vividness and reality of attraction, which every side of human affairs possessed for this glowing and incessantly animated spirit.

In spite of a good many surface affectations, which may have cheated the lighter heads, but which may now be easily seen through, and counted off for as much as they are worth, Byron possessed a bottom of plain sincerity and rational sobriety, which kept him substantially straight, real, and human, and made him the genuine exponent of that immense social movement which we sum up as the Revolution. If Keats's whole soul was absorbed by sensuous impressions of the outer world, and his art was the splendid and exquisite reproduction of these; if Shelley on the other hand distilled from the fine impressions of the senses by process of inmost meditation some thrice ethereal essence, 'the viewless spirit of a lovely sound'; we may say of Byron that, even in the moods when the mightiness and wonder of nature had most effectually possessed themselves of his imagination, his mind never moved for very long on these remote heights apart from the busy world of men, but returned again like the fabled dove from the desolate void of waters to the ark of mortal stress and human passion. Nature, in her most dazzling aspects or stupendous parts, is but the background and theatre of the tragedy of man.

We may find a secondary proof of this in the fewness of those fine descriptive strokes and subtle indirect touches of colour or sound, which arise with incessant spontaneity, where a mastering passion for nature steeps the mind in vigilant, accurate, yet half-unconscious, observation. It is amazing through how long a catalogue of natural objects Byron sometimes takes us, without affixing to one of them any but the most conventional term, or a single epithet which might show that in passing through his mind it had yielded to him a beauty or a savour that had been kept a secret from the common troop. Byron is certainly not wanting in commanding image, as when Manfred likens the lines of foaming light flung along from the Alpine cataract to 'the pale courser's tail, the Giant steed, to be bestrode by death.' But imaginative power of this kind is not the same thing as that susceptibility to the minutest properties and unseen qualities of natural objects, which reveals itself in chance epithet of telling felicity, or phrase that opens to us hidden lights. Our generation is more likely to think too much than too little of this; for its favourite poet, however narrow in subject and feeble in moral treatment, is without any peer in the exquisitely original, varied, and imaginative art of his landscape touches.

This treatment of nature was in exact harmony with the method of revolutionary thought, which, from the time of Rousseau downwards, had appealed in its profound weariness of an existing social state to the solitude and seeming freedom of mountain and forest and ocean, as though the only cure for the woes of civilisation lay in annihilating it. This was an appeal less to nature than from man, just as we have said that Byron's was, and hence it was distinct from the single-eyed appreciation and love of nature for her own sake, for her beauty and terror and unnumbered moods, which has made of her the

mistress and consoler of many men in these times. In the days of old faith, while the catholic gods sat yet firm upon their thrones, the loveliness of the universe shone to blind eyes. Saint Bernard in the twelfth century could ride for a whole day along the shore of the Lake of Geneva, and yet when in the evening his comrades spoke some word about the lake, he inquired, 'What lake?'¹ It was not mere difference of temperament that made the preacher of one age pass by in this marvellous unconsciousness, and the singer of another burst forth into that tender invocation of 'clear, placid Leman,' whose 'contrasted lake with the wild world he dwelt in' moved him to the very depths. To Saint Bernard the world was as wild and confused as it was to Byron; but then he had gods many and saints many, and a holy church in this world, and a kingdom of heaven awaiting resplendent in the world to come. All this filled his soul with a settled certitude, too absorbing to leave any space for other than religious emotion. The seven centuries that flowed between the spiritual mind of Europe when Saint Bernard was its spokesman, and the spiritual mind of which Byron was the interpreter, had gradually dissolved these certitudes, and the faint lines of new belief and a more durable order were still invisible. The assurance of science was not yet rooted, nor had men as yet learned to turn back to the history of their own kind, to the long chronicle of its manifold experiences, for an adequate system of life and an inspiring social faith. So they fled, in spirit or in flesh, into unfamiliar scenes, and vanished from society, because society was not sufficiently social.

The feeling was abnormal, and the method was fundamentally artificial. A sentimentalism arose, which is in art what the metaphysical method is in philosophy. Yet a literature

(1) Morison's *Life of St. Bernard*, p. 68 (2nd edit.)

was born of it, whose freshness, force, elevation, and, above all, a self-assertion and peculiar aspiring freedom that have never been surpassed, still exert an irresistible attraction, even over minds that are furthest removed from the moral storm and disorder, and the confused intellectual convictions, of that extraordinary group. Perhaps the fact that their active force is spent, and that men find in them now only a charm and no longer a gospel, explains the difference between the admiration which some of us permit ourselves to feel for them, and the impatient dislike which they stirred in our fathers. Then they were a danger, because they were a force, misleading amiable and highminded people into blind paths. Now this is at an end, and, apart from their historic interest, the permanent elements of beauty draw us to them with a delight that does not diminish, as we recede further and further from the impotence of the aspirations, which thus married themselves to lofty and stirring words. To say nothing of Rousseau, the father and founder of the nature-worship, which is the nearest approach to a positive side that the Revolution has ever possessed, how much fine colour and freshness of feeling there is in *Réné*, what a sense of air and space in *Paul et Virginie*, and what must they have been to a generation that had just emerged from the close parlours of Richardson, the best of the sentimentalists of the præ-revolutionary type? May we not say, too, in parenthesis, that the man is the votary, not of wisdom, but of a bald and shapeless asceticism, who is so excessively penetrated with the reality, the duties, the claims, and the constant hazards of civilisation, as to find in himself no chord responsive to that sombre pensiveness into which Obermann's unfathomable melancholy and impotence of will deepened, as he meditated on the mean shadows which men are content to chase for happiness, and on all the pigmy progeny

of giant effort? *C'est peu de chose, says Obermann, de n'être point comme le vulgaire des hommes; mais c'est avoir fait un pas vers la sagesse, que de n'être plus comme le vulgaire des sages.* This penetrating remark hits the difference between De Sénancourt himself and most of the school. He is absolutely free from the vulgarity of wisdom, and breathes the air of higher peaks, taking us through mysterious and fragrant pine-woods, where more than he may find meditative repose amid the heat and stress of that practical day, of which he and his school can never bear the burden.

In that *vulgaire des sages*, of which De Sénancourt had none, Byron abounded. His work is in much the glorification of revolutionary commonplace. Melodramatic individualism reaches its climax in that long series of Laras, Conrads, Manfreds, Harolds, who present the fatal trilogy, in which crime is middle term between debauch and satiety, that forms the natural development of an anti-social doctrine in a full-blooded temperament. It was this temperament which, blending with his gifts of intellect, gave Byron the amazing copiousness and force that makes him the dazzling master of revolutionary emotion, because it fills his work with such variety of figures, such free change of incident, such diversity of passion, such a constant movement and agitation. It was this never-ceasing stir, coupled with a striking concreteness and an unflinching directness, which rather than any markedly correct or wide intellectual apprehension of things, made him so much more than any one else an effective interpreter of the moral tumult of the epoch. If we look for psychological delicacy, for subtle moral traits, for opening glimpses into unobserved depths of character, behold, none of these things are there. These were no gifts of his, any more than the divine gift of music was his. There are some writers whose words but half express the inde-

finable thoughts that inspired them, and to whom we have to surrender our whole minds with a peculiar loyalty and fulness, independent of the letter and printed phrase, if we would liquefy the frozen speech and recover some portion of the imprisoned essence. This is seldom a necessity with Byron. His words tell us all that he means to say, and do not merely hint nor suggest. The matter with which he deals is gigantic, and he paints with violent colours and sweeping pencil.

Yet he is free from that declamation with which some of the French poets of the same age, and representing a portion of the same movement, blow out their cheeks. An angel of reasonableness seems to watch over him, even when he comes most dangerously near to an extravagance. He is equally free from a strained antithesis, which would have been inconsistent, not only with the breadth of effect required by Byron's art, but also with the peculiarly direct and forcible quality of his genius. In the preface to *Marino Faliero*, a composition that abounds in noble passages, and rests on a fine and original conception of character, he mentions his 'desire of preserving a nearer approach to unity, than the irregularity which is the reproach of the English theatre.' And this sound view of the importance of form, and of the barbarism to which our English genius is prone, from 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill' up to the clownish savagery which occasionally defaces even plays attributed to Shakespeare, is collateral proof of the sanity and balance, which marked the foundations of his character, and which at no point of his work ever entirely failed him. Byron's admiration for Pope was no mere eccentricity.

We may value this self-control the more, by remembering the nature of his subjects. We look out upon a wild revolutionary welter, of vehement activity without a purpose, bound-

less discontent without a hope, futile interrogation of nature in questions for which nature can have no answer, unbridled passion, despairing satiety, impotence. It is too easy, as the history of English opinion about Byron's poetic merit abundantly proves, to underrate the genius which mastered so tremendous a conflict, and rendered that amazing scene with the flow and energy and mingled tempest and forlorn calm, which belonged to the original reality. The essential futility of the many moods which went to make up all this, ought not to blind us to the enormous power that was needed for the reproduction of a turbulent and not quite aimless chaos of the soul, in which man seemed to be divorced alike from his brother men in the present, and from all the long succession and endeavour of men in the past. It was no small feat to rise to a height that should command so much, and to exhibit with all the force of life a world that had broken loose from its moorings.

It is idle to vituperate this anarchy, either from the point of view of a sour and precise Puritanism, or the more elevated point of a rational and large faith in progress. Wise men are like Burke, who did not know how to draw an indictment against a whole nation. They do not know how to think nothing but ill of a whole generation, that lifted up its voice in heartfelt complaint and wailing against the conceptions, forms, and rulers, human and divine, of a society that the inward faith had abandoned, but which clung to every outward ordinance; which only remembered that man had property, and forgot that he had a spirit. This is the complaint that rings through Byron's verse. It was this complaint that lay deep at the bottom of the Revolution, and took form in every possible kind of protest, from a dishevelled neckcloth up to a profession of atheism. Byron elaborated the common emotion, as the

earliest modern poets elaborated the common speech. He gave it inflections, and distinguished its moods, and threw over it an air of system and coherency, and a certain goodly and far-reaching sonorousness. This is the usual function of the spiritual leader, who leaves in bulk no more in the minds of those whom he attracts than he found, but he leaves it articulate with many sounds, and vivid with the consciousness of a multitude of defined impressions.

That the whole movement, in spite of its energy, was crude, unscientific, virtually abortive, is most true. That it was presided over by a false conception of nature as a benign and purifying power, while she is in truth a stern force to be tamed and mastered, if society is to hold together, cannot be denied of the revolutionary movement then, any more than it can be denied of its sequels now. Nor need we overlook its fundamental error of tracing half the misfortunes and woes of the race to that social union, to which we are really indebted for all the happiness we know, including even this dignifying sensibility of the woes of the race; and the other half to a fictitious entity styled destiny, placed among the nethermost gods, which would be more rightly regarded as the infinitely modifiable influence exercised by one generation of ourselves upon those that follow.

Every one of these faults of thought is justly chargeable to Byron. They were deeply inherent in the Revolution. They coloured thoughts about government, about laws, about morals. They effected a transformation of religion, but, resting on no basis of philosophical acceptance of history, the transformation was only temporary. They spread a fantastic passion, of which Byron was himself an example and a victim, for extraordinary outbreaks of a peculiar kind of material activity, that met the exigencies of an imperious will, while it had not the irksome-

ness of the self-control which would have exercised the will to more permanent profit. They destroyed faith in order, natural or social, actual or potential, and substituted for it an enthusiastic assertion of the claims of the individual to make his passions, aspirations, and convictions, a final and decisive law.

Such was the moral state which Byron had to render and interpret. His relation to it was a relation of exact sympathy. He felt the force of each of the many currents that united in one destructive stream, wildly overflowing the fixed banks, and then, when it had overflowed, often, it must be confessed, stagnating in lazy, brackish pools, while new tributaries began to flow in together from far other quarters. The list of his poems is the catalogue of the elements of the revolutionary spirit. For of what manner is this spirit? Is it not a masterful and impatient yearning after many good things, unsubdued and uninformed either by a just knowledge of the time, and the means which are needed to bring men the fruits of their hope, or by a fit appreciation of orderly and tranquil activity for the common service, as the normal type of the individual life? And this is precisely the temper and the spirit of Byron. Nowhere else do we see drawn in such traits that colossal figure, which has haunted Europe these four-score years and more, with its new-born passion, its half-controlled will, its constant cry for a multitude of unknown blessings under the single name of freedom, the one known and unadulterated word of blessing. If only truth, which alone of words is essentially divine and sacrosanct, had been the chief talisman of the Revolution, the movement would have been very different from that which we know. But to claim this or that in the name of truth, would have been to borrow the language which priests and presbyters, Dominic and Calvin, had covered thick with hateful associations. Freedom, after all, was the next best

thing, for it is an indispensable condition of the best of all ; but it could not lead men until the spirit of truth, which means science in the intellectual order, and justice in the social order, had joined company with it.

So there was violent action in politics, and violent and excessive stimulation in literature, the positive effects of the force moved in each sphere being deplorably small in proportion to the intense moral energy which gave the impulse. In literature the straining for mental liberty was the more futile of the two, because it expressed the ardent and hopeless longing of the individual for a life, which we may perhaps best call life unconditioned. And this unconditioned life, which the Byronic hero vainly seeks, and not finding, he fills the world with stormy complaint, is least of all likely to offer itself in any approximate form to men penetrated with gross and egotistical passions to their inmost core. The Byronic hero went to clasp repose in a frenzy. All crimson and aflame with passion, he groaned for evening stillness. He insisted on being free, in the corroding fetters of resentment and scorn for men. Conrad sought balm for disappointment of spirit in vehement activity of body. Manfred represents the confusion common to the type, between thirst for the highest knowledge and proud violence of unbridled will. Harold is held in a middle way of poetic melancholy, equally far from a speechless despair and from gay and reckless licence, by contemplation of the loveliness of external nature, and the great exploits and perishing monuments of man in the past ; but he, equally with the others, embodies the paradoxical hope that angry isolation and fretful estrangement from mankind are equivalent to emancipation from their pettiness, instead of being its very climax and demonstration. As if freedom of soul could exist without orderly relations of intelligence and partial acceptance between a man

and the sum of surrounding circumstances. That universal protest which rings through Byron's work with a plangent resonance, very different from the whimperings of punier men, is a proof that so far from being free, one's whole being is invaded and laid waste. It is no ignoble mood, and it was a most inevitable product of the mental and social conditions of western Europe at the close of the eighteenth century. Everlasting protest, impetuous energy of will, melancholy and despondent reaction ;—this is the revolutionary course. Cain and Conrad ; then Manfred and Lara and Harold.

In studying that portion of the European movement, which burst forth into flame in France between the fall of the Bastille and those fatal days of Vendémiaire, Fructidor, Floréal, Brumaire, in which the explosion came convulsively to its end, we seem to see a microcosm of the Byronic epos. The succession of moods is identical. Overthrow, rage, intense material energy, crime, profound melancholy, half-cynical dejection. The Revolution was the battle of Will against the social forces of a dozen centuries. Men thought that they had only to will the freedom and happiness of a world, and all nature and society would be plastic before their daring, as clay in the hands of the potter. They could only conceive of failure as another expression for inadequate will. Is not this one of the notes of Byron's Ode on the fall of Bonaparte? 'L'audace, l'audace, et toujours l'audace.' If Danton could have read Byron, he would have felt as one in front of a magician's glass. Every passion and fit, from the bloody days of September down to the gloomy walks by the banks of the Aube, and the prison-cry that 'it were better to be a poor fisherman than to meddle with the governing of men,' would have found itself there. It is true that in Byron we miss the firmness of noble and generous

hope. This makes him a more veritable embodiment of the Revolution than such a precursor as Rousseau, in whom were all the unclouded anticipations of a dawn, that opened to an obscured noon and a tempestuous night. Yet one knows not, in truth, how much of that violence of will and restless activity and resolute force was due less to confidence, than to the urgent necessity which every one of us has felt, at some season and under some influence, of filling up spiritual vacuity by energetic material activity. Was this the secret of the mysterious charm that scenes of violent strife and bloodshed always had for Byron's imagination, as it was perhaps the secret of the black transformation of the social faith of '89 into the worship of the Conqueror of '99? Nowhere does Byron's genius show so much of its own incomparable fire and energy, nor move with such sympathetic firmness and amplitude of pinion, as in *Lara*, the *Corsair*, *Harold*, and other poems, where 'Red Battle stamps his foot,' and where

The Giant on the mountain stands,
His blood-red tresses deep'ning in the sun,
With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,
And eye that scorcheth all it glows upon.

Yet other and intrinsically nobler passages, where this splendid imaginative energy of the sensations is replaced by the calmer glow of social meditation, prove that Byron was penetrated with the distinctively modern scorn and aversion for the military spirit, and the distinctively modern conviction of its being the most deadly of anachronisms. Such indirect satisfaction to the physical energies was to him, as their direct satisfaction was to the disillusioned France of '99, the relief demanded by a powerful nature for the impotence of hope and vision.

However this may have been, it may be confessed that Byron presents less of the flame of his revolutionary prototypes,

and too much of the ashes. He came at the end of the experiment. But it is only a question of proportion. The ashes belong as much and as necessarily to the methods of the Revolution, in that phase, as do the blaze, that first told men of possible light and warmth, and the fire, which yet smoulders with abundant life underneath the grey cinders. And we have to remember that Byron came in the midst of a reaction ; a reaction of triumph for the partisans of darkness and obstruction, who were assured that the exploded fragments of the old order would speedily grow together again, and a reaction of despondency for those who had filled themselves with illimitable and peremptory hopes. Silly Byronical votaries, who only half understood their idol, and loved him for a gloom, that in their own case was nothing but a graceful veil for selfishness and mental indolence, saw and felt only the melancholy conclusion, and had not travelled a yard in the burning path that led to it. They hugged Conrad's haughty misery, but they would have trembled at the thought of Conrad's perilous expedition. They were proud despondent Laras after their manner, 'lords of themselves, that heritage of woe,' but the heritage would have been still more unbearable, if it had involved Lara's bodily danger.

This shallowness has no part in Byron himself. His weariness was a genuine outcome of the influence of the time upon a character consumed by passion. His lot was cast among spent forces, and, while it is no hyperbole to say that he was himself the most enormous force of his time, he was only half conscious of this, if indeed he did not always inwardly shrink from crediting his own power and strength, as so many strong men habitually do, in spite of noisy and perpetual self-assertion. Conceit and presumption have not been any more fatal to the world, than the waste which comes of great men failing in their

hearts to recognise how great they are. Many a man whose affectations and assumptions are a proverb, has lost the magnificent virtue of simplicity, for no other reason than that he needed courage to take his own measure, and so finally confirm to himself the reality of his pretensions. With Byron, as with some of his prototypes among the men of action in France and elsewhere, theatrical ostentation, excessive self-consciousness, extravagant claims, cannot hide from us that their power was secretly drained by an ever-present distrust of their own aims, their own methods, even of the very results they seemed to have achieved.

This diffidence was an inseparable consequence of the vast predominance of exalted passion over reflection, which is one of the revolutionary marks. Byron was fundamentally and substantially, as has been already said, one of the most rational of men. Hence when the passionate fit grew cold, as it always does in temperaments so mixed, he wanted for perfect strength a justification in thought. There are men whose being is so universally possessed by phantasies, that they never feel this necessity of reconciling the visions of excited emotion with the ideas of ordered reason. Byron was more vigorously constituted, and his susceptibility to the necessity of this reconciliation combined, with his inability to achieve it, to produce that cynicism which the simple charity of vulgar opinion attributes to the possession of him by unclean devils. It was his refuge, as it sometimes is with smaller men, from the disquieting confusion which was caused by the disproportion between his visions and aspirations, and his intellectual means for satisfying himself seriously as to their true relations and substantive value. Only the man arrives at practical strength who is convinced, whether rightly or wrongly, that he knows all about his own ideas that needs to be known. Byron never

did thus know himself, either morally or intellectually. The higher part of him was consciously dragged down by the degrading reminiscence of the brutishness of his youth and its connections and associations, which hung like miasma over his spirit. He could not rise to that sublimest height of moral fervour, when a man intrepidly chases from his memory past evil done, suppresses the recollection of old corruptions, declares that he no longer belongs to them nor they to him, and is not frightened by the past from a firm and lofty respect for present dignity and worth. It is a good thing thus to overthrow the tyranny of the memory, and to cast out the body of our dead selves. That Byron never attained this good, though he was not unlikely to have done so, if he had lived longer, does not prove that he was too gross to feel its need, but it explains a moral weakness, which has left a strange and touching mark on some of his later works.

So in the intellectual order, he knew too much in one sense, and in another too little. The strong man is not conscious of gaps and cataclysms in the structure of his belief, or else he would in so far instantly cease to be strong. One living, as Byron emphatically did, in the truly modern atmosphere, was bound by all the conditions of the atmosphere to have mastered what we may call the natural history of his own ideas and convictions; to know something of their position towards fact and outer circumstance and possibility; above all to have some trusty standard for testing their value, and assuring himself that they do really cover the field which he takes them to cover. People with a faith and people living in frenzy are equally under this law; but they take the completeness and coherency of their doctrine for granted. Byron was not the prey of habitual frenzy, and he was without a faith. That is to say, he had no firm basis for his conceptions, and he was aware that

he had none. The same unrest which drove men of that epoch to Nature, haunted them to the end, because they had no systematic conception of her working, and of human relations with her. In a word, there was no science. Byron was a warm admirer of the genius and art of Goethe, yet he never found out the central secret of Goethe's greatness, his luminous and coherent positivity. This is the crowning glory of the modern spirit, and it was the lack of this, which went so far to neutralise Byron's hold of the other chief characteristics of that spirit, its freedom and spaciousness, its humaneness and wide sociality, its versatility and manysidedness, and passionate feeling for the great natural forces.

This positivity is the cardinal condition of strength for times when theology lies in decay, and the abstractions which gradually replaced the older gods have in their turn ceased to satisfy the intelligence and mould the will. All competent persons agree that it is the first condition of the attainment of scientific truth. Nobody denies that men of action find in it the first law of successful achievement in the material order. Its varied but always superlative power in the region of æsthetics is only an object of recent recognition, though great work enough has been done in past ages by men whose recognition was informal and inexpress. It is plain that, in the different classes of æsthetic manifestation, there will be differences in objective shape and colour, corresponding to the varied limits and conditions of the matter with which the special art has to deal; but the critic may expect to find in all a profound unity of subjective impression, and that, the impression of a self-sustaining order and a self-sufficing harmony among all those faculties and parts and energies of universal life, which come within the idealising range of art. In other words, the cha-

racteristically modern inspiration is the inspiration of law. The regulated play of forces shows itself as fit to stir those profound emotional impulses which wake the artistic soul, as ever did the gracious or terrible gods of antique or middle times. There are glories in Turner's idealisation of the energies of matter, which are at least as nobly imaginative and elevated, in spite of the conspicuous absence of the human element in them, as the highest products of the artists who believed that their work was for the service and honour of a deity.

It is as mistaken to suppose that this conviction of the supremacy of a cold and self-sustained order in the universe is fatal to emotional expansion, as it would be to suppose it fatal to intellectual curiosity. Experience has shown in the scientific sphere, that the gradual withdrawal of natural operations from the grasp of the imaginary volitions of imaginary beings has not tamed, but greatly stimulated and fertilised, scientific curiosity as to the conditions of these operations. Why should it be otherwise in the æsthetic sphere? Why should all that part of our mental composition which responds to the beautiful and imaginative expression of real truths, be at once inflamed and satisfied by the thought that our whole lives, and all the movements of the universe, are the objects of the inexplicable caprice of Makers who are also Destroyers, and yet grow cold, apathetic, and unproductive, in the shadow of the belief that we can only know ourselves as part of a stupendous and inexorable succession of phenomenal conditions, moving according to laws, that may be formulated positively, but not interpreted morally, to new destinies that are eternally unfathomable? Why should this conception of a coherent order, free from the arbitrary and presumptuous stamp of certain final causes, be less favourable, either to the ethical or the æsthetic side of human nature, than the older conception of the regulation of

the course of the great series by a multitude of intrinsically meaningless and purposeless volitions? The alertness of our sensations for all sources of outer beauty remains unimpaired. The old and lovely attitude of devout service does not pass away to leave vacancy, but is transformed into a yet more devout obligation and service towards creatures that have only their own fellowship and mutual ministry to lean upon; and if we miss something of the ancient solace of special and personal protection, the loss is not unworthily made good by the growth of an imperial sense of participation in the common movement and equal destination of eternal forces.

To have a mind penetrated with this spiritual persuasion, is to be in full possession of the highest strength that man can attain. It springs from a scientific and rounded interpretation of the facts of life, and is in a harmony, which freshly found truths only make more ample and elaborate, with all the conclusions of the intellect in every order. The active energies are not paralysed by the possibilities of enfeebling doubt, nor the reason drawn down and stultified by apprehension lest its methods should discredit a document, or its inferences clash with a dogma, or its light flash unseasonably on a mystery. There is none of the baleful distortion of hate, because evil and wrong-doing and darkness are acknowledged to be effects of causes, sums of conditions, terms in a series; they are to be brought to their end, or weakened and narrowed, by right action and endeavour, and this endeavour does not stagnate in antipathy, but concentrates itself in transfixing a cause. In no other condition of the spirit than this, in which firm acquiescence mingles with valorous effort, can a man be so sure of raising a calm gaze and an enduring brow to the cruelty of circumstance. The last appalling stroke of annihilation itself is measured with purest fortitude by one, whose religious contemplation dwells

most habitually upon the sovereignty of obdurate laws in the vast revolving circle of physical forces, on the one hand, and, on the other, upon that moral order which the vision and pity of good men for their fellows, guiding the spontaneous energy of all men in strife with circumstance, have raised into a structure sublimer and more amazing than all the majesty of outer nature.

In Byron's time the pretensions of the two possible answers to the great and eternally open questions of God, Immortality, and the like, were independent of that powerful host of inferences and analogies, which the advance of physical discovery, and the establishment of a historical order, have since then brought into men's minds. The direct aggressions of old are for the most part abandoned, because it is felt that no fiercest polemical cannonading can drive away the impalpable darkness of error, but only the slow and silent presence of the dawning truth. *Cain* remains, a stern and lofty statement of the case against that theological tradition, which so outrages, where it has not already too deeply depraved, the conscience of civilised man. Yet every one who is competent to judge, must feel how infinitely more free the mind of the poet would have been, if besides this just and holy rage, most laudable in its kind, his intellectual equipment had been ample enough and precise enough to have taught him, that all the conceptions that races of men have ever held, either about themselves or their deities, have had a source in the permanently useful instincts of human nature, are capable of explanation, and of a historical justification; that is to say, of the kind of justification which is, in itself and of its own force, the most instant destruction to what has grown to be an anachronism.

Byron's curiously marked predilection for dramatic composition, not merely for dramatic poems, as *Manfred* or *Cain*,

but for genuine plays, as *Marino Faliero*, *Werner*, the *Two Foscari*, was the only sign of his approach to the historic or positive spirit. Dramatic art, in its purest modern conception, is genuinely positive; that is, it is the presentation of action, character, and motive, in a self-sufficing, and self-evolving order. There are no final causes, and the first moving elements are taken for granted to begin with. The dramatist creates, but it is the climax of his work to appear to stand absolutely apart and unseen, while the play unfolds itself to the spectator, just as the greater drama of physical phenomena unfolds itself to the scientific observer, or as the order of recorded history extends in natural process under the eye of the political philosopher. Partly, no doubt, the attraction which dramatic form had for Byron is to be explained by that revolutionary thirst for action, of which we have already spoken; but partly also it may well have been due to Byron's rudimentary and unsuspected affinity with the more constructive and scientific side of the modern spirit.

His idea of Nature, of which something has been already said, pointed in the same direction; for, although he made an abstraction and a goddess of her, and was in so far out of the right modern way of thinking about these outer forces, it is to be remembered, that, while this dominant conception of Nature as introduced by Rousseau and others into politics was most mischievous and destructive, its place and worth in poetry are very different; because here in the region of the imagination it had the effect, without any pernicious practical consequences, of giving shape and proportion to that great idea of Ensemble throughout the visible universe, which may be called the beginning and fountain of right knowledge. The conception of the relationship of the different parts and members of the vast cosmos was not accessible to Byron, as it is to a later

generation, but his constant appeal, in season and out of season, to all the life and movement that surrounds man, implied and promoted the widest extension of consciousness of the wholeness and community of natural processes.

There was one very manifest evil consequence of the hold, which this idea in its cruder shape gained over Byron and his admirers. The vastness of the material universe, as they conceived and half adored it, entirely overshadowed the principle of moral duty and social obligation. The domestic sentiment, for example, almost disappears in those works which made Byron most popular, or else it only appears, to be banished with reproach. This is quite in accordance with the revolutionary spirit, which was in one of its most fundamental aspects a revolt on behalf of unconditioned individual rights, and against the family. If we accept what seems to be the fatal law of progress, that excess on one side is only moderated by a nearly corresponding excess of an opposite kind, the Byronic dissolution of domestic feeling was not entirely without justification. There is probably no uglier growth of time than that mean and poor form of domesticity, which has always been too apt to fascinate the English imagination, ever since the last great effort of the Rebellion, and which rose to the climax of its popularity when the mad and malignant George III. won all hearts by living like a farmer. Instead of the fierce light beating about a throne, it played lambently upon a sty. And the nation who admired, imitated. When the Regent came, and with him that coarse profligacy which has alternated with cloudy insipidity in the annals of the line, the honest part of the world, out of antipathy to the son, was driven even further into domestic sentimentality of a greasy kind, than it had gone from affection for the sire.

Byron helped to clear the air of this. His fire, his lofty spaciousness of outlook, his spirited interest in great national causes, his romance, and the passion both of his animosity and his sympathy, acted for a while like an electric current, and every one within his influence became ashamed to barter the large heritage of manhood, with its many realms and illimitable interests, for the sordid ease of the hearth and the good word of the unworthy. He fills men with thoughts that shake down the unlovely temple of comfort. This was good, to force whoever was not already too far sunk into the mire, high up to the larger atmosphere, whence they could see how minute an atom is man, how infinite and blind and pitiless the might that encompasses his little life. Many feeble spirits ran back homewards from the horrid solitudes and abysses of *Manfred*, and the moral terrors of *Cain*, and even the despair of *Harold*, and, burying themselves in warm domestic places, were comforted by the familiar restoratives and appliances. Firmer souls were not only exhilarated, but intoxicated by the potent and unaccustomed air. They went too far. They made war on the family, and the idea of it. Everything human was mischievously dwarfed, and the difference between right and wrong, between gratification of appetite and its control for virtue's sake, between the acceptance and the evasion of clear obligation, all became invisible or of no account in the new light. That constancy and permanence, of which the family is the type, and which is the first condition alike of the stability and progress of society, was obliterated from thought. As if the wonders that have been wrought by this regulated constancy of the feeling of man for man in transforming human life, were not far more transcendently exalting, than the contemplation of those glories of brute nature, which are barbaric in comparison.

It would be unjust not to admit, that there are abundant passages in his poems of too manifest depth and sincerity of feeling, for us to suppose that Byron himself was dead to the beauty of domestic sentiment. The united tenderness and dignity of Faliero's words to Angiolina, before he goes to the meeting of the conspirators, would, if there were nothing else, be enough to show how rightly, in his better moods, the poet appreciated the conditions of the family. Unfortunately the better moods were not fixed, and we had *Don Juan*, where the wit and colour and power served to make an anti-social and licentious sentiment attractive to puny creatures, who were thankful to have their lasciviousness so gaily adorned. As for Great Britain, she deserved *Don Juan*. A nation, whose disrespect for all ideas and aspirations that cannot be supported by a text, nor circulated by a religious tract society, was systematic, and where consequently the understanding is least protected against sensual sophisms, received no more than a just chastisement in 'the literature of Satan.' Here again, in the licence of this literature, we see the finger of the Revolution, and of that egoism which makes the passions of the individual his own law. Let us condemn and pass on, homily undelivered. If Byron injured the domestic idea on this side, let us not fail to observe how vastly he elevated it on others, and how, above all, he pointed to the idea above and beyond it, in whose light only can that be worthy, the idea of a country and a public cause. A man may be sure that the comfort of the hearth has usurped too high a place, when he can read without response the lines declaring that domestic ties must yield in 'those who are called to the highest destinies, which purify corrupted commonwealths.'

We must forget all feelings save the one,—

We must resign all passions save our purpose,—

We must behold no object save our country,—
 And only look on death as beautiful,
 So that the sacrifice ascend to heaven
 And draw down freedom on her evermore.

Calendaro. But if we fail——

I. Bertuccio They never fail who die
 In a great cause : the block may soak their gore ;
 Their heads may sodden in the sun ; their limbs
 Be strung to city gates and castle walls—
 But still their spirit walks abroad. Though years
 Elapse, and others share as dark a doom,
 They but augment the deep and sweeping thoughts
 Which overpower all others, and conduct
 The world at last to freedom. What were we
 If Brutus had not lived ? He died in giving
 Rome liberty, but left a deathless lesson—
 A name which is a virtue, and a soul
 Which multiplies itself throughout all time,
 When wicked men wax mighty, and a state
 Turns servile.

And the man who wrote this was worthy to play an even nobler part than the one he had thus nobly described ; for it was not many years after, that Byron left all, and laid down his life, for the emancipation of a strange land, and ‘Greece and Italy wept for his death, as it had been that of the noblest of their own sons.’ Detractors have done their best to pare away the merit of this act of self-renunciation by attributing it to despair. That contemporaries of their own humour had done their best to make his life a load to him is true, yet to this talk of despair we may reply in the poet’s own words,

When we know
 All that can come, and how to meet it, our
 Resolves, if firm, may merit a more noble
 Word than this, to give it utterance.

There was an estimate of the value and purpose of a human life, which our Age of Comfort may fruitfully ponder.

To fix upon violent will and incessant craving for movement as the mark of a poet, whose contemporaries adored him for what they took to be the musing sweetness of his melancholy, may seem a critical perversity. There is, however, a momentous difference between that melancholy, which is as the mere shadow projected by a man's spiritual form, and that other melancholy, which itself is the reality and substance of a character; between the soul to whom dejection brings graceful relief after labour and effort, and the soul which by irresistible habit and constitution dwells ever in Golgotha. This deep and penetrating subjective melancholy had no possession of Byron. His character was essentially objective, stimulated by outward circumstance, moving to outward harmonies, seeking colour and image and purpose from without. Hence there is inevitably a certain liveliness and animation, even when he is in the depths. We feel that we are watching clouds sweep majestically across the sky, and, even when they are darkest, blue interspaces are not far off. Contrast the moodiest parts of *Childe Harold* or of *Cain*, with Novalis's *Night Hymns*. Byron's gloom is a mere elegance in comparison. The one pipes to us with a graceful despondency on the edge of the gulf, while the other carries us actually down into the black profound, with no rebellious cry nor shriek of woe, but sombrely awaiting the deliverance of death, with soul absorbed and consumed by weariness. Let the reader mark the note of mourning struck in the opening stanzas, for instance, of Novalis's *Longing after Death*,¹ their simplicity, homeliness, transparent sincerity, and

(1) The *Sehnsucht nach dem Tode* opens thus:—

Hinunter in der Erde Schooss,
Weg aus des Lichtes Reichen!
Der Schmerzen Muth und wilder Stoss
Ist froher Abfahrt Zeichen!
Wir kommen in dem engen Kahn
Geschwind am Himmelsufer an.

then turn to any of the familiar passages, where Byron meditates on the good things which the end brings to men. How artificial he seems, and unseasonably ornate, and how conscious of his public. In the first, we sit sadly on the ground in some veritable Place of a Skull ; in the second, we assist at tragical distress after the manner of the Italian opera. We should be disposed to call the first a peculiarly German quality, until we remember Pascal. With Novalis, or with Pascal, as with all those whom character, or the outer fates, or the two together, have drawn to dwell in the valley of the shadow, gloom and despondency are the very stuff of their thoughts. Material energy could have done nothing for them. Their nerves and sinews were too nearly cut asunder. To know the quality of Byron's melancholy, and to recognise how little it was of the essence of his character, we have only to consider how far removed he was from this condition. In other words, in spite of morbid manifestations of one sort and another, he always preserved a salutary and vivid sympathy for action, and a marked capacity for it.

It was the same impetuous and indomitable spirit of effort which moved Byron to his last heroic exploit, that made the

Gelobt sey uns die ew'ge Nacht,
 Gelobt der ew'ge Schlummer !
 Wohl hat der Tag uns warm gemacht,
 Und welk der lange Kummer.
 Die Lust der Fremde ging uns aus.
 Zum Vater wollen wir nach Haus.

Was sollen wir auf dieser Welt,
 Mit uns'rer Lieb' und Treue ?
 Das Alte wird hintangestellt ;
 Was soll uns dann das Neue ?
 O ! einsam steht und tiefbetrübt
 Wer heiss und fromm die Vorzeit liebt.

poetry inspired by it so powerful in Europe, from the deadly days of the Holy Alliance onwards. Cynical and misanthropical as he has been called, as though that were his sum and substance, he yet never ceased to glorify human freedom, in tones that stirred the hearts of men and quickened their hope and upheld their daring, as with the voice of some heavenly trumpet. You may, if you choose, find the splendour of the stanzas in the Fourth Canto on the Bourbon restoration, on Cromwell, and Washington, a theatrical splendour. But for all that, they touched the noblest parts of men. They are alive with an exalted and magnanimous generosity, the one high virtue which can never fail to touch a multitude. Subtlety may miss them, graces may miss them, and reason may fly over their heads, but the words of a generous humanity on the lips of poet or chief have never failed to kindle divine music in their breasts. The critic may censure, and culture may wave a disdainful hand. As has been said, all such words 'are open to criticism, and they are all above it.' The magic still works. It is as though some mysterious and potent word from the gods had gone abroad over the face of the earth.

This larger influence was not impaired by Byron's ethical poverty. The latter was an inevitable consequence of his defective discipline. The triteness of his moral climax is occasionally startling. When Sardanapalus, for instance, sees Zarina torn from him, and is stricken with profound anguish at the pain with which he has filled her life, he winds up with such a platitude as this :—

To what gulfs
A single deviation from the track
Of human duties leaves even those who claim
The homage of mankind as their born due!

The baldest writer of hymns might work up passion enough for a

consummation like this. Once more, Byron was insufficiently furnished with positive intellectual ideas, and for want of these his most exalted words were constantly left sterile of definite and pointed outcome.

More than this, Byron's passionate feeling for mankind was narrowed by his failure to include in his conception the long succession of generations, that stretch back into the past and lie far on in the misty distances of the future. This was a defect that his conception shares in common with that religion, which, while sublimely bidding man to love his neighbour as himself, yet leaves him in the profundity of a concentrated regard for his own soul, to forget both sacred reverence for the unseen benefactors of old time, and direct endeavour to be more to the future, than even the benefactions of the past have been to him. No good man is without both these sentiments in germ. But to be fully effective, they need to be fused together into a single thought, completing that idea of humanity, which, when imperfectly held, so constantly misleads men into short-sighted action, effective only for the hour, and at the hour's end turning to something worse than ineffective. Only he stands aright, who from his little point of present possession ever meditates on the far-reaching lines, which pass through his point from one interminable starlight distance to another. Neither the stoic pagan, nor the disciple of the creed which has some of the peculiar weakness of stoicism and not all its peculiar strength, could find Manfred's latest word untrue to himself:—

The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts—
Is its own origin of ill and end,
And its own place and time: its innate sense,
When stripped of this mortality, derives

No colour from the fleeting things without:
But is absorbed in sufferance or joy,
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.

It is only when a man subordinates this absorption in individual sufferance and joy to the thought that his life is a trust for humanity, that he is sure of making it anything other than 'rain fallen on the sand.' In his own career Byron was loftier than the individualism of his creed, and for this reason, though he may have no place in our own Minster, he belongs to the band of far-shining men, of whom Pericles declared the whole world to be the tomb.

**SOME GREEK CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL
GROWTH.**

SOME GREEK CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL GROWTH.

I.

THE name of philosophy has been so habitually usurped for speculation respecting the nature of knowledge, the limits of the human understanding, the underlying substance of matter, and all those other questions which lie within the domain of the metaphysician, that men need to be reminded that, while all these inquiries have been prosecuted with an amount of assiduity more than proportionate to their fruits, at the same time thinkers have in all periods of intellectual activity been busy upon inquiries of another kind, which belong equally to the history of philosophy. No impulse which stirs mankind to curiosity and speculation ever fails to communicate a general movement, nor unless there be some violent interruption from without, will this impulse suffer arrest, until it has made itself felt at every point in the circle of the things which the foremost men of every generation are in a state to think upon. Thought moves along many grooves and with unequal rapidity, but the stream never rises very high in one of these channels, without something like a corresponding elevation in every other. The curiosity of a generation once fully kindled, it penetrates with more or less force throughout the whole sphere of speculation.

In other words, every leading division of our knowledge has its tradition; and it would be the work of a historian of

human thought to trace the several threads that mark the sometimes labyrinthine paths, along which the intelligence of man has travelled, in exploring the material universe, in unsealing the mysteries of his own being, and in investigating the organisation and growth of societies. It would be found that the last of these great divisions has a continuity in its development, not less marked than that which philosophic writers have abundantly traced in the other two. Here also, in social philosophy, as in physical science, and as in philosophy purely speculative, we mark progressive rectification of method, and increasing breadth of conception, taking place in obedience to the same force which stimulated and guided, and, let us add, which limited, inquiry in metaphysics and natural sciences; the sum, namely, and totality of the intellectual conditions of a period, in the society where at the time they happened to be most favourable. Examination of the relations of matter, which are the object of the splendid and dazzling group of physical sciences; examination of the relations among the various intellectual faculties, and of their relations to external things, which are the concern of mental science; examination of the relations of men in society, which are the matter of social philosophy: in all three there has been equally decisive if not equally systematic striving and endeavour of human thought, and if the last lags behind one, at any rate, of the two others, the reason is to be found in its greater complexity, its greater difficulty, consequently, and in the fact that some of its fundamental truths depend for their verification upon the advance of certain of the physical sciences.

The problems of metaphysics, and the more fruitful investigation of the relations of matter, have beyond doubt engaged a far larger share of the attention of the foremost speculative and philosophic intellects among Western nations since

Aristotle. We search the chronicle of political philosophy in vain for such giants as Descartes or as Newton. In vain we seek for specific, cardinal, and undying contributions to the philosophy of society, such as the great discoverers made to our knowledge of the large working of the physical universe. For this, as for every other fact in the history of thought, there is an explanation; and this, like every other characteristic of the mental advance of the race, is to be accounted for. In the first place, the great events of the physical world outside of our own life are much more likely to strike the imagination and fix the attention of early thinkers, than the complex and scattered facts connected with society. The heavenly bodies and the ocean, plants and animals, instantly impress their awful order, their extreme regularity of change, rising and setting, waxing and waning, ebbing and flowing, growing and decaying, upon the first minds endowed with the fruitful blessing of curiosity. Men first scrutinize the order and ponder the laws of objects plainly and directly accessible to sense. But society is invisible and impalpable to the untrained understanding at all times; to recognise it as an independent and adequate object of philosophic contemplation is only possible, when a certain progress has been made. Many steps must have been taken in the path of accurate observation and curious interrogation, before we are likely to become aware of the existence of the great social mechanism in which we are contained, to whose operations we contribute momentum and guidance, but which controls the individual, and identifies itself with his life and thoughts, to a point which makes him as insensible of its movement apart from him, as he is unconscious of the motions of the planet on which he is whirled through space.

The second consideration is, that those who were most strongly drawn by the tendencies of their character towards

the subject of the organisation of society, whose intellectual impulses were in the political direction at all, who were interested enough in the relations of men in communities to think deeply about them, were impelled by such tendencies and such an interest into practical courses. In them they found the most inviting, and, as it might seem to conscientious men, the most fruitful, field for the development of their social feelings. It is perfectly natural in itself, that anybody with a mind strongly addicted to social subjects as themes for speculation should be comparatively easily diverted from labour in the speculative order, by claims on his practical capacity. When a large political amelioration presents itself as within reach, one must be more deeply committed to the passion for pure speculation, than is at all desirable in the interests of mankind, to be able to resist the opportunity of applying theoretical principles, and exemplifying social maxims. Burke is one familiar instance, and his illustrious contemporary, Turgot, is another, of this constantly exhibited conversion of political thinkers into statesmen. The number of such withdrawals must undoubtedly be reckoned one of the causes, which have helped to keep back the philosophy of society.

Thirdly, as has been frequently remarked within the last half century, it was impossible that any adequate philosophy of society should form itself, until the idea of succession or growth in the history of societies had acquired some consistency, and found a foot-hold in similar ideas, relative to other subjects, which had come earlier into men's possession. Christianity stamped into current belief the vital doctrine of the brotherhood of men, but this elevating relationship seemed to be virtually confined to a sense of the brotherhood of contemporaries. The Church, it is true, by instituting the practice of canonising the supposed benefactors of the race, and in a less

degree, perhaps, by the habit of praying for the souls of the departed, did something to propagate a sense of that wider kinship which binds us not only to our brothers of to-day, but also quite as closely to all our precursors. Still this was wholly ineffectual as a contribution to a right doctrine of the succession of states of society, because religious teaching always implied, as it mostly does now, a violent cataclysm between pagan and Christian times. Practically the brotherhood of men came to mean the brotherhood of believing contemporaries, where it was not even further narrowed within the brotherhood of this or that believing sect; and the theory at its best only looked to the past of the Christian society, and took no heed of the movements of the race outside of this, still less of the possibility of this not being a final state of spiritual conviction. It is a remarkable example of the slowness with which the truths of historical sequence make their way to men's minds, that while habitually hearing about the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecy in the person of Christ, and even deriving an argument for the truth of their faith from this prophecy, religious instructors have usually manifested the warmest dislike for any attempt to trace Christianity historically to Judaical development. It has been justly remarked that the success of the historical spirit in the last century was ruined by the contempt, entertained by those most imbued with this spirit, for the only record that could have really instructed them. It is just as true that the great lesson of development and human progress, which men might have learnt from Christianity as the nobler product of Hebrew religious feeling, was hidden from the eyes of all but one or two churchmen of rare capacity, like Bossuet, for instance, by the universally entertained antipathy to look upon Christianity as anything but a spontaneous and autochthonic kind of product, unconnected with the past, and perma-

nently drawing a deep trench between those who accepted it, and all the rest of men, past, present, and to come. In this way the idea of succession and growth was not only not promoted, but was actually checked by Christian feeling. It was not till astronomy and some of the other physical sciences had marched far enough for men to have their attention drawn to the distance traversed since the earliest known speculations, that the notion could come to be entertained of a corresponding march, sequence, or continuity, in all those other conceptions, speculative and scientific, by which the order of the successive states of society is fixed.

But if these and other reasons help us to understand why the systematic surveys of the various orders of physical facts, and of the customs and nature of men, which are the object of moral philosophy, should have been so much more numerous, and apparently more thriving, it would be a great mistake to suppose that in the field of social philosophy there is no orderly progress to mark in the development of opinion, no steps in speculation to measure, no succession of conceptions and methods capable of appreciation and historic estimate. The distance from Aristotle to Condorcet, from Plato to Montesquieu and Comte, in their general ideas as to the constitution of political bodies, and in their method of approaching their investigation, may be traced out, and described, and measured, in the same way in which a historian of inductive science would lead us from Ptolemy to Copernicus, Kepler and Newton, or a historian of speculative philosophy from Thales or Xenophanes to Hume and Kant.

Men have stumbled at the same place in consequence of the same kind of infirmity in mental constitution; the same provisional explanations of the phenomena of society have been

accepted for final and absolute, and have eventually been superseded by other explanations, as the intellectual possessions of mankind increased, and as the intellectual capital of the race went on accumulating, giving to each successive generation so many more advantages in dealing with unexplored lands, so many improved implements, so many economising maxims of an enlarged experience to start from. The erroneous kinds of opinions which men have held with respect to the phenomena classified as astronomical, chemical, physiological, and the rest, have had their day also in the region of social phenomena, and they have fallen here before the same processes of thought, which slowly deprived them of credit elsewhere. People are ceasing to accept a special act of divine creation, for example, as the explanation of the origin of the different species of animals; and they are ceasing to believe that a supernatural intervention was needed to found human society, and to give men patterns for their laws. Storms and earthquakes, again, are no longer regarded as indicating the wrath of a supreme power against the sufferers, but as the results of atmospheric and terrestrial conditions; and the decline and ruin of a community, instead of being traced to the mysterious ill-will of the gods, are systematically traced to a violation, whether voluntary or inevitable, of those material, economical, and political conditions, on which the prosperity of the community happened to depend. The notions of Lightness, Heaviness, Vitality, as independent and absolute qualities, have disappeared from one region; and the notion of an independent and absolute Law of Nature may be said to have disappeared in another. Chemists no longer seek the golden elixir, and social inquirers are content with something much below an ideal community, constituted after a single type.

Yet the errors are no more in one case than another to be

SOCIAL GROWTH.

disdain. They mark the human knowledge has been mental faculties strengthened. through the same stages; and in its own way as instructive knowledge of the conclusions finally landed us. The struggle, though of many sides; thought, of the growth of objects, in the appreciation of. The circumstance that is covered, received addition longer be made to cover, and information of this the facts were not explained, reason why we should simply reason and without discussion, hypotheses and discredited and shrunken conceptions, is

in a general way the goal, the significance of history, have been pretty uniformly which speculation has run in give us a just idea what to has been the nature, and expression of states of society. the most general expression place, is that it consists in an ascertainable and concerned capricious, irregular,

and isolated. The same expression would serve to denote the general character of the movement of thought in, what for men must always be, the true master-science. Here also progress has consisted in the gradual substitution of conceptions of an order appreciable by reason, and consistent with the general form of the rest of our knowledge, for the tacit acceptance of a theory of inscrutable accidents, ostensibly veiled under a variety of respectable designations. Meditation in the light of conclusions arrived at in the more exact sciences, displaces the prepossessions of theologians, who, while forced to perceive that the creator of the universe permits its physical phenomena to order themselves in a system whose unvarying rules we can find out, yet have been reluctant to concede that this supreme being follows the same method in the phenomena of human nature and society. A similar displacement is effected, by equally sure steps, of these other prepossessions, which, perhaps in order to confer a factitious dignity on man, attributed to him an occult faculty of Will, existing mysteriously apart from the rest of his mental constitution, sovereign, absolute, not to be counted upon, nor accounted with, itself amenable to no order, and therefore putting to rout the idea of order among the entire class of facts in which it is an element. That each state of society is what it is, and comes where it does, owing to the operation of ordered causes—this is the conception, which supersedes the theological explanation of such states and their historical succession by the unascertainable and irregular volitions of a superior being; and the metaphysical explanation by the capricious, uncaused, and incalculable energy of the volitions of men.

It would be alike unphilosophical and ungrateful to deny that each of the two decayed or decaying notions of the method of social advance has, in its season, been productive both of

OF SOCIAL GROWTH.

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classes, and the relation of
common beliefs which they

entertain on all the subjects most important to mankind, and the degree of assurance with which those beliefs are held; their tastes and the character and degree of their æsthetic development; their form of government, and the more important of their laws and customs. The condition of all these things and of many more which will readily suggest themselves, constitute the state of society or the state of civilization at any given time.¹ By those who live in our day, and are competent to have an opinion, this fact of the multiplicity of conditions which characterises any state of society but the very rudest, is accepted as an elementary truth. But the failure to perceive how many facts enter into the composition of a social state, is the root of the impotence of most speculation upon society, and explains also most of those disastrous repulses which have attended the efforts of ardent practical reformers. Thinkers and innovating statesmen have almost uniformly forgotten that, to reconstruct or to move society, it is necessary to touch not one, but a whole group of conditions; that the social order does not work in a single line,—a form of government, a certain set of religious beliefs or ecclesiastical institutions, a body of positive laws, or any other isolated circumstance,—but along a broad row of parallel grooves. It is true that to modify some of the most important of these manifold conditions is to modify all the others; but the first modification can only be judicious in practice or sound in theory, when the entire group of leading circumstances is steadily kept in sight, and the habit of keeping them thus in sight is one of the latest acquisitions in social philosophy. If Aristotle had lived now, he would not have thought it adequate to explain the identity of the State as consisting in identity of constitution; or, at any

(1) *System of Logic*, Bk. VI. Ch. x. § 2. 'Of the Inverse Deductive or Historical Method.'

rate, he would hardly have thought the question that could be rightly answered in this sense worth proposing for settlement.¹ The identity of a State depends upon identity in many more points than mere form of civil polity.

The inevitable power of mere phraseology has had a great deal to do with this erroneous disposition to look at sets of social phenomena in isolation. Just as the terms, Matter, Form, Cause, and the rest, led the early physicists into unprofitable thinking, so such terms as Government, Law, King, Democracy, are apt to lead men, insufficiently on their guard, into contemplating the objects which they denote, as separate and independent, rising up and operating from inherent qualities of their own, without reference to all those other conditions of the society, its religion, its wealth, its manners, its historic tradition, which compose the surrounding medium. The student of history sees only too much of this tendency, to ignore the number of facts which every social inquirer would now feel bound to take into full account. Meanwhile, it is enough to premise that, along with a recognition of the truth of there being an order among the phenomena of human nature and society, there comes in a consciousness of the wide collection of circumstances and conditions which constitute that order.

From this second characteristic of the long transition from a wrong method to a right one, there flows a third of the greatest practical importance. As soon as it is perceived that the law of states of society is the order of the relations among a considerable number of social circumstances, then those abstract and universal propositions about government and polity, which form the staple of political thought, exclusively down to the time of Montesquieu, and very largely including one of the

(1) *Politics*, Bk. III. Ch. iii.

most considerable names of all, down to the Revolution, are abandoned in favour of narrower propositions, of a strictly relative and provisional quality. Men detect the absurdity of debating upon the best form of government, for instance, when they have been made to see that the form of government is only one of many conditions in which the welfare of a community is bound up, that these conditions are found in a great many various degrees of development, and therefore that the superiority of one form of government over another varies with the changes in the surrounding circumstances. No government is best in the abstract, without reference to the intellectual development of a community, the degree of public cohesiveness which it has reached, the amount of social virtue which may be counted upon, and a number of other considerations. And in the same way with laws, they are gradually divested of the associations of sovereign power and influence, which are in early times attributed to them, and they are seen to depend for influence upon their harmony with the group of other conditions. Hence all propositions about laws assume the same relative complexion which belongs to propositions about forms of government. In religion, again, where people have been most apt to insist upon finding absolute and universal truth, the same current of thought, the same perception of the close connection which binds all the social facts together, exposes the unmistakable way in which belief in this exalted region still depends, for the possibility of its prevailing, upon the degree of its conformity to, and compatibility with, the other intellectual and moral conditions of the time.

This way of thinking brings us close to that historic conception of society, which is the final result of the various positive tendencies of investigation, one or two of which we have just tried to characterise. The precise source of the asso-

with progressive societies, stationary societies also, forms part of the history of European civilization. There can be little doubt that the ideas to the gradual comparison of the sensations, in the process of becoming assimilated in the mind, led to a mental association between the ideas, and the rise of his various faculties; and this association led to the notion of a correspondence between the ideas, habits, and institutions of different nations. Apart from this movement, writers like Montesquieu and Buffon gratify a curiosity as to the customs of unfamiliar countries, and think about the different stages of civilization reached by different nations, added to a recognition of the fact that the difference extended, not only to the different stages, but to the different circumstances themselves, to so many circumstances, that it is something analogous to the process of growth throughout the organism, we can see that the growth of the human mind is a process of conception; a reference of every stage in the evolution of its faculties to the growth and relative position of the whole, is necessary to observe all the rest. The study of the physical universe, of the progress of the human mind, is a march in a harmonious and orderly manner is the result of the action

of human faculties upon outward circumstances, of the reaction of circumstances on the human faculties, of the transmission of improvements in our aptitudes, and of the constant removal, further and yet further, of the mental posts from which successive generations commence their advance forth into the regions of the unknown.

We may now turn back from this final stage to the more special subject of the present essay, some of the conceptions, namely, of social progress that were entertained by the two most illustrious of ancient thinkers. We have seen, in its larger traits, the shape in which the dynamical side of social philosophy ends, and may the more intelligently examine its earliest beginning.

II.

In primitive times we may well believe the intelligence of men to be satisfied with the same sort of explanation of the facts of society, as that which contents them in reference to facts that are more impressive to the elementary senses. This explanation is theological, and in such stages of civilisation, for they deserve to be called civilised in comparison with the prolonged night that has preceded, the chief ingredients in the the social state, like all other things, are apprehended either as manifestations, or actual embodiments, of so many divinities. The Greeks, in the earlier times, not only conceived the sun, and the earth, and the winds as divine persons, but they understood each Themis, or judgment of the king, to be a special inspiration breathed into his mind by the god. It was not merely Field-labour and Sowing that the oldest Romans represented to themselves as gods; by the side of Ops and Saturnus, in this infant theology, there was a place for the social virtues of Faithfulness and Concord. Every act and every con-

dition had its religious aspect; and this remains true, in proportion to the nearness of the community to fetishist belief. One elementary system included and shaped the entire body of these pristine notions, and everything that men saw or thought about was subjected to this organic unity of interpretation.

It would be more truly descriptive to say that thought, in its later and more correct sense, had no existence in primitive ages. Explanations are sought for, not to satisfy an intellectual appetite for knowledge, but to appease the excited emotions; and none have any chance of being accepted, nor indeed of being offered, which do not harmonise with the apprehensive, disquieted, and expectant temper, which is characteristic of a society in the rudest theological phase. 'The sentiment of curiosity as it then existed,' says Mr. Grote, describing the state of the early Greek mind, 'was only secondary and derivative, arising out of some of the strong primary or personal sentiments,—fear or hope, antipathy or sympathy,—impression of present weakness,—unsatisfied appetites and longings,—wonder and awe under the presence of the terror-striking phenomena of nature.'¹ In other words, intelligence is aroused from its primal torpor, not by its own spontaneously working force, but stimulated by an extreme inquietude of the emotions.

This is one reason why there is much less play of intelligence in the earlier epochs about social facts, such as laws, origin of the community, and the like, than about other objects.²

(1) Grote's *Plato*, i. p. 2.

(2) Mr. Maine, indeed, holds (*Ancient Law*, p. 361) that 'as soon as the mind makes its first conscious efforts towards generalisation, the concerns of everyday life are the first to press for inclusion within general rules and comprehensive formulas,' and that the earliest intellectual exercise to which a young nation devotes itself is the study of its laws. This may have a certain truth with

For there is no association of wonder, hope, or longing, about the relations of society.

Still, so far as man in the early stage of union has any germs of social conceptions, they spring from the same soil, and are guided by the same dominant influences of mental climate, as his ideas upon external nature. The only difference is that, as social conceptions come last under the influence of curiosity and examination, they are the last in which men shake off the hold of the system that gave these conceptions form and colour. Whole generations of physical speculators came and went, and substituted scientific theories for the personal agency of the gods, before a feeling arose of the necessity of a similar transformation in regard to the social order. Thales began to ask questions about the Cosmos, two centuries before Plato and Aristotle made their attempts to solve some of the problems connected with the organisation of human communities.

It is true that the earliest germs of social philosophy may be traced to as remote a time, as the origin of purely physical inquiry. Thales was himself one of the Seven Wise Men, and while he apparently was most remarkable for his theories of the material universe, others of them acquired their fame as sages by broad generalisations upon life, society, and conduct. But these precepts were mainly prudential, the records and conclusions of individual experience, the register of observations of the ways of the world.¹ They were practical rather than theoretical, wisdom rather than philosophy. That they should have suggested themselves to their authors, and been treasured up by all who heard them, is not at all incompatible with an

reference to the Romans, who were for so long absorbed by the pressing exigencies of their military position, and thus acquired that habit of practical interest in everyday concerns which always distinguished them; but is it a true account of the order of intellectual activity at Athens?

(1) Grote's *Greece*, Part II. c. xxix. (vol. iii. p. 82).

unbroken incuriosity as to the conditions which led to such maxims being true. They mark no decisive step forward, such as, in physics, was involved in the famous speculation of Thales, which dethroned the divine Oceanus as the father of things, and installed in his stead the notion of Water as the universal and indispensable quality of all matter. In the sayings of the Wise Men there was no unconsciously revolutionary turning away from the gods, and this turning away is the test of the establishment of philosophy in one department of inquiry and in all.

Of the other ancients, we know that the doctrine of Pythagoras, who is supposed to have flourished in the latter half of the sixth century, was held to have a certain direct social bearing. And in two points, by all accounts, he manifested what was unhappily a precocious amount of elevated and humane feeling. He apparently did not disdain female disciples. And, through his remarkable doctrine of metempsychosis, he was able to introduce a noble idea of duty in connection with our relations to the lower animals, a region of morals in which opinion even now needs so urgently to be stimulated.¹

Democritus, again, who came a century later, is believed to have in some sort anticipated the great encyclopædic conception of Aristotle, and he must therefore have included in his teaching some more or less distinctly formed social theory. In this case it is possible that he is entitled to the glory of having been the first to hold the lamp of speculation to politics. But the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ are too far off, and their history is too dim, for us to know these things with any

(1) See M. Comte's *Phil. Pos.*, vol. v. p. 68, where the writer describes the important influence exerted by Fetichism, both directly in leading to the preservation, in a stage when destructive impulses preponderate, of useful species, and indirectly in contributing to soften the human character.

certainty or precision. Practically it is with the writings of Plato that a history of social philosophy would have to begin. In them we find the earliest record of deliberate thinking about the origin, growth, tendencies, and best organisation, of the political union. The name of Socrates, whose intellectual originality and vigour only matched the ardent interest he had in men, marks the starting point of social speculation. So far as we can now ascertain, it was he who first applied analysis, not only to such received conceptions as Knowledge and Virtue, but also to the current ideas about government, legislation, and the succession of political states. Previously to his introduction of a searching dialectic, which divided and distributed the objects of speculation, inquirers had sought for, what in modern phraseology would be called, some single general law, some one comprehensive formula, which might cover or explain the entire phenomena of the universe. The method of Socrates put an end to this search, assuredly bootless then, and perhaps to prove vain always, for a single expression in which the sum of knowable things, the one arcanum of manifold forces, may be resumed and resolved. He separated politics, as well as ethics, from the physical inquiries with which they had heretofore been improperly mixed, and in doing so expressly constituted them a specific object of speculation, with a proper standard and a matter of its own. The significance of such a step, simple and obvious as it may seem to those who have once seen it taken, or inherited unconsciously and without effort the fruits of its having been taken, cannot be over-rated. To conceive society, the various sentiments associated with it, the relations and duties flowing from it, as the fit object of systematic meditation and scientific treatment, was perhaps beyond comparison the most important advance ever made in the intellectual progress of the race. If we consider the vital effects of mere

terms and phrases upon the expansiveness of thought, the benefits of Socratic methods in that direction only, by promoting some accuracy, variety, and definiteness in political speech, will seem superlative.

The high social feeling, which constitutes the greatest glory of Socrates, is thus remarkable for being systematic and regulated, as distinguished from that mere philanthropic or vague humanity, which, however creditable to the benevolence of the individual who is animated by it, is often so purely mischievous to the community. Mr. Grote has dwelt with a just emphasis on this distinctive quality of the first social philosopher. 'That "the proper study of mankind is man," Socrates was the first to proclaim. He recognised the security and happiness of man both as the single end of study, and as the limiting principle whereby it ought to be circumscribed.'¹ This mood is so familiar to us now, that we cannot without a certain vigorous effort of imagination do adequate justice to the force of mind implied in the first clear recognition, both of the wellbeing of man as the object of theoretic contemplation, and of the subordinate and auxiliary relation in which all other sciences stand to the science of society.

That the full scope and meaning of the discovery was hidden from the eyes of the Greeks, is no reason why we should grudge the glory that belongs to them for seizing the central idea, from which the amplifications of riper times have proceeded. Many harsh things have been said of the social incompetency of the Greeks practically, and that they were socially incompetent is only too plain. Let us remember, however, that this was the price they paid for their insatiable intellectual curiosity, and the resplendent intellectual achievements to which it led; and that the failure of their own organisation

(1) Grote's *Greece*, Chap. lxviii. (vi. 115).

in stability, and in most other material points, except the free play of individual intelligence which it encouraged, has been amply redeemed for posterity by the precious secrets which that freely playing intelligence was the means of unlocking. The Greek free polities fell after a miserably short existence, and they fell, because the conditions which led to their incessant and unrestrained intellectual activity were fatal to that social subordination in the individual, and that cohesion in the many, without which communities inevitably decay. But in surveying the history of the gradual evolution of humanity, this political catastrophe sinks into profound insignificance, when we count the advantages to mankind of which that was the cost.¹

It would be more than superfluous here to enter into any examination of the multitude of questions about Plato, into which the historian of Greek thought, or of speculative philosophy, or the commentator upon the Platonic dialogues, is

(1) In a previous essay some account has been given of the dislike and contempt in which the Greeks were held by De Maistre (see p. 174). Comte, in his later speculations, outdid even De Maistre in his disparagement of their services to progress, intimating among other things that though it was unnecessary in the Athenian magistrate to put Socrates to death, it was sufficiently natural. Socrates, 'une étroit genie, repoussait aveuglement l'essor scientifique au nom d'une vague préoccupation morale.' (*Politique Positive*, iii. 343.) The reason of Comte's aversion to Greek thinkers is their failure to subordinate *l'esprit* to *le cœur*. On one of them only he places any value, 'the incomparable Aristotle;' but then how could Aristotle himself have occupied his position in philosophy, if Socrates and Plato had not prepared the way for him, at least by breaking up common language for philosophic use, if by no other service? The whole chapter (c. iv. of vol. iii.) is very remarkable, and for its character may perhaps be compared to the retrogressive and obscurantist spirit, in which the Plato of the *Laws* would have punished by imprisonment and death, those whom the Plato of earlier dialogues had stimulated to use their own minds with independence. It is painful, in such a connection, to have to question whether Greek speculative effort has ever been meanly valued by any one, who was also a sincere friend to the freedom of human intelligence?

reasonably expected to enter. How far Plato was essentially a sceptic, how far he was a dogmatist; to what extent he represents accurately the personality, method, convictions, either of Socrates or of himself; whether any systematic and authoritatively expounded doctrine ought to be attributed to him; these and the other subjects of controversy among Platonic students have a special interest of their own, but the difficulty of arriving at positive results is too great, and the connection of such conclusions with the present subject, even if they could be assured, is too slight, to warrant a digression into what is essentially the region of literary and personal history. One thing only need be said, and this is, that whatever may be the case with other branches of their manifold inquiries, in the sphere of political philosophy at any rate, it is useless to search the Platonic writings for any one coherent, positive, and systematic, theory of social movement.

For one thing, with the exception of the *Laws* and the *Statesman*, there are no purely and exclusively political treatises, and the latter of these seems to partake more of the nature of a prelude in the art of logical division, than of a positive description; while the former, if more or less systematic, is in many points of cardinal importance, on which we shall have presently to dwell, directly at variance with the spirit and letter of the political portion of the *Republic*. We may, however, well be content with describing some of the various political ideas, which were in circulation in the fourth century before Christ, as struck in the Platonic or Socratic mint, without being over solicitous whether or no they all fit in to a single uniform system. Men are but shades of names, and much of the labour that is devoted to the association of completed schemes with these shadows, is as frivolous and unworthy, as it is necessarily sterile. In such distant ages, where anything

like assurance about persons is impossible, it is only ideas that are worth pursuit and exploration, and artificial attempts to force them into frames and moulds will not be persisted in by rational men.

The most interesting point in connection with every social thinker is his conception of the nature of what we should now call the evolution of humanity, or the many-grooved historic movement of society; and, what this conception was with Plato, we are unable to determine with any precise conclusiveness. We can perceive that the problems, of which a conception of this kind would have been the accepted solution, were all present to him; the questions, for example, what were the beginnings of society; what the forces which first modified and have since continued to modify these early conditions; whether there is any order in these successive modifications. On each of these fundamental points in social speculation there are opinions hinted, or broadly stated, in one place or another in his writings. That such questions should have presented themselves now for the first time, is the circumstance most worthy of remark, apart from the interest which attaches to the specific solutions.

The explanation of the genesis of a community in which Plato comes closest to the historic method, and it is very close, is to be found in the *Republic*. 'The growth of a City, I fancy,' says Socrates, 'must spring from this, that each of us individually is not self-sufficing, but has a great many wants. It is thus that, on account of these numerous wants, each person invites the aid of others to meet one requirement and another, and so when a number of people have been got together in a single abiding-place, as comrades and helpmates, we call such a place a City. It arises from our natural

requirements.'¹ The speaker then goes on to trace the rise of the division of labour in the same spirit. The roots of this are found in the three facts, that different men are born with different gifts and aptitudes; that men succeed better when they confine themselves to a single craft, than when they spread themselves over many; and that, inasmuch as work often demands attention at a given moment, at the risk of becoming good for nothing, the craftsman ought to be entirely at its beck and call, which he could hardly be if he were engaged in various employments.² Thus the second condition of a City arises, diversity and specialisation of craftsmanship.

The City, however, is not likely to be planted in such a situation as to be able to meet all its own wants without a certain amount of importation; and it cannot procure imports, except in exchange for commodities of its own; it must therefore produce a superfluity, of the right sort of goods and in the right quantity, to meet the wishes of those from whom it needs other goods in return. Hence the necessity for ever larger numbers of producers of various sorts, for merchants, and for sailors, as some of the traffic will pretty certainly be maritime; for markets, dealers, and a currency.³

This, we are informed, would be something like the normal type of the healthy development of a community. But modifying conditions of a more equivocal sort soon spring up, still

(1) *Rep.*, II. p. 369. B. γίγνεται τοίνυν πόλις, ἐπειδὴ τυγχάνει ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ αὐτάρκης, ἀλλὰ πολλῶν ἐνδείης. . . . ποιήσει δὲ αὐτὴν ἡ ἡμετέρα χρεία.

(2) *Rep.*, II. 370.

(3) *Rep.*, II. 371. Plato's phrase for money, νόμισμα ξύμβολον τῆς ἀλλαγῆς ἔνεκα, is less full and complete than Aristotle's excellent definition (*Polit.*, I. ix. 8)—διὸ πρὸς τὰς ἀλλαγὰς τοιοῦτόν τι συνίθεντο πρὸς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς διδόναι καὶ λαμβάνειν, ὃ τῶν χρησίμων αὐτὸ ὃν εἶχε τὴν χρεῖαν εὐμεταχείριστον πρὸς τὸ ζῆν, τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἀπλῶς ὀρισθὲν μεγέθει καὶ σταθμῷ, τὸ δὲ τελευταῖον καὶ χαρακτηῖρα ἐπιβαλλόντων, ἵνα ἀπολύσῃ τῆς μετρήσεως αὐτοῦς· ὁ γὰρ χαρακτηριστικὸς τοῦ ποσοῦ σημεῖον.

resting on the wants of men, only wants no longer simple and natural. Luxurious desires and habits are indulged, and to satisfy these, encroachments on the lands of neighbouring communities are necessarily resorted to; these communities retaliate; and so wars take place, entailing the necessity of fighting men, and so forth.¹

The meritorious elements in this conception consist, first, in the perfect rationality or positivity of its method, which seeks for an explanation of a social fact simply in its own conditions; and, next, in its attribution of all the more rudimentary modifications of a society to the rudimentary wants and inclinations of our nature. To understand the merit of this, we have only to compare with it the strange futilities of Divine Right, on the one side, and Social Compact, on the other, which divided European thought on the subject in subsequent times.

By way of illustrating the former of these characteristics,—the recognition of the origin of institutions in a convenient adaptation of social arrangements to circumstances,—we may cite Socrates's account of the way in which a class of stationary retail dealers or middlemen would be likely to spring up; first, because of the inconvenience of the producer having to spend his time in seeking purchasers, and, second, because persons of unusual physical weakness would naturally perceive that, by stationary trading between producer and consumer, they would both be obviating this inconvenience, and at the same time be putting themselves to the best use of which they were capable.² Contrasting this simple and reasonable explanation with Adam Smith's discovery of the principle, which gives occasion to the division of labour, in our inborn human disposition to exchange,³ we may measure the distance between the metaphysical,

(1) *Rep.*, II. 373.

(2) *Rep.*, II. 371.

(3) 'The division of labour is the necessary, though very slow and gradual

or abstract, explanation of the facts of society as springing from imagined qualities of human nature, and their positive explanation as the result of a constant interaction between men's faculties and the demands and accommodation of surrounding circumstances.

The same perfect rationality may be noticed, also, in the account of the way in which a community would be likely to involve itself in war, through luxury and the extraordinary necessity, which would come with luxury, for new lands for pasture and agriculture: though all philosophers now are agreed that war precedes the formation of political societies, whether, like Comte, we attribute war to the carnivorous nature of man, or explain it by an inherent destructive tendency, which man does not share with the brutes, who are only destructive because they are hungry.¹

The deficiencies of the conception are quite as plain as its merits. There is no germ in it of the idea of successive stages of human progress from the original state of nature, each stage having a corresponding form and organisation, or quasi-organisation, of the community which is passing through it. If the student were to forget that he is now contemplating the infancy of social speculation, he would find it wonderful that Plato, having recognised the natural wants of man as the source and bond of the social union, and having perceived that these wants are not fixed, but grow by what they feed upon, and having, moreover, shown a perfect appreciation of the active connection between wants and external circumstances, should not have

consequence of a certain propensity in human nature, . . . the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.'—*Wealth of Nations*, Bk. I. c. ii.

Turgot, less metaphysically; '*Le besoin reciproque a introduit l'échange de ce qu'on avait contre ce qu'on n'avait pas.*'—*Sur la Formation et la Distribution des Richesses*, § xxxiii.

(1) See the opening of the Platonic *Laws*.

carried his imagination further back, and seen that the first term of the series lies long before the epoch of the husbandman, the tailor, and the shoemaker, each practising his own craft, and that war is likely as often as not to be the first, and not the last, necessity or state of man, as it is of all other animals. In short, the idea of development is only grasped in a very partial manner. There is a certain absoluteness in the conception, where it ought to have been received as strictly relative and conditional. Plato here assumes, without discussion or reflection, a given condition as rudimentary, which is in fact a condition comparatively advanced. A tribe in the fishing and hunting stage seems to be wholly ignorant of the division of labour, even where physical difference of sex might be expected to have suggested it, and it is not until the primitive race has emerged from this state, in consequence of some change in the soil or the fauna of the country in which they happen to find themselves, that the 'want of a great many things' begins to make itself a moving force. Granting a certain state of intelligence and social experience, then Plato's account is satisfactory enough. But this particular state is not the starting-point, as Socrates takes it to be.

Another defect in the conception is equally visible. It is not merely our wants which lead to the social union, but, still more directly, our inborn social impulses, the products or essential conditions of our physical organisation. Aristotle was distinctly in advance of Plato, as Plato stands in this particular exposition. 'By nature,' he says, 'we all have in us the impulse to join in this union.'¹ This is the initial force. The gradual growth of a variety of wants, corresponding to the

(1) *Arist. Polit.*, I. ii. 15. φύσει μὲν οὖν ἡ ὁρμή ἐν πᾶσιν ἐπὶ τὴν τοιαύτην κοινωνίαν. Not, as Adam Smith says, a ὁρμή ἐπὶ τὴν ἀλλαγὴν, which is strictly derivative from the other.

gradual modification of social circumstances, is what determines the direction of this force, and imposes upon it a given form.

It should be said, however, on Plato's behalf, that in the famous myth in the *Protagoras* we may perhaps trace some discernment of the truth of the social quality being instinctive in man. Hermes carrying Justice and Moderation down to mortal men, asks Zeus whether these two gifts are to be distributed universally, or only to a few special persons, as the gift of healing is given, because one physician is enough for a whole group of people. 'Let these two gifts be distributed to all,' Zeus replies; 'for cities would never come into existence, if only a few individuals partook of these gifts, as is the case with other arts.'¹ This, after all, is the equivalent expression for the truth which Aristotle states in more real and scientific form.

And if we consider the genesis of specific social virtues, elsewhere Plato shows a very exact appreciation of the conditions which engender and foster them. In the *Republic*, for example, Socrates, confuting Thrasymachus, points out that even robbers feel the necessity of justice in their dealings with one another, because they know that without it they could not succeed in their enterprises.² In other words, convenience or expediency dictates the shape or mode of the virtue—justice, loyalty, or faithfulness. The capacity for its practice, the faculty of sociality, essential for even the most temporary unions, which Socrates does not inquire about, is the universally allotted gift of Zeus, or, as Aristotle puts it, an impulse which exists in all by nature. It must be remembered, however, that Aristotle is stronger and more definite on the necessity of this spontaneous social impulse, as a factor in the formation of a community. This is

(1) *Protag.*, 322. D. οὐ γὰρ ἂν γένοιτο πόλις, εἰ ὀλίγοι αὐτῶν μετέχουσιν ὥσπερ ἄλλων τεχνῶν.

(2) Plato, *Rep.*, I. 351.

one of the instances which Platonic persons who have not read Plato overlook, where the idol of the intuitionists is less of a believer in innate impulses than Aristotle.

In the *Laws*, believed to have been composed by Plato in his old age, we find another and, in some respects, a more remarkable account of the growth of societies, than this which we have just been considering in the *Republic*. In the last-named treatise, which is also so much better known to most readers than almost any other Platonic piece, it must always be borne in mind that the political matter is strictly incidental. The *Republic* is essentially a treatise on morals. Ethically its object would seem to be to surround Justice with such recommendations as would make its practice desirable, independently of the consequences which might flow from it in the way of public repute, wealth, and power, which the current teaching insisted on as its sole persuasive. The acute pleading of Adeimantus points out the dangerous tendency of such teaching, for he shows how these external consequences might follow an undeserved character for justice, quite as certainly as they do the real possession and actual practice of it.¹ He therefore invites Socrates to place a virtue so precious and so exalted on a securer base, and this base, or supplementary consolation, is eventually fixed in the supposed fact that a man is happier intrinsically for being just, quite apart from extrinsic rewards, just in the same way as he is happier for being healthy, apart from the external advantages which his health may enable him to procure. The amount of truth which there may be in this position, it is not within our province here to examine. But critics have been led into such great injustice to the author of the *Republic*, by insisting on regarding it exclusively, or prin-

(1) *Rep.*, II. 362—367.

cipally, as a constructive political essay, that it is most important to remember the true nature of this famous dialogue. The ideal state is here an incident; in the *Politics* of Aristotle, on the contrary, the construction of the ideal state is the designed and express object of deliberation. So it is also in the *Laws* of Plato, in which the constitution is devised and discussed in compliance with the invitation of Kleinias, who informs his companion that he is one of a body of ten, appointed to found a new colony at a hitherto unsettled point in Crete.¹

In this connection we may notice, in passing, a circumstance which must naturally have given an impulse to the Greek fancy for constructing political Utopias. Attention has been called more than once to the influence which was exercised by the extraordinary institutions of Sparta, in emboldening the speculations of the Greek theorists upon government and society.² It was difficult for any theorist to dream of an amount of power, for the rulers of his ideal state, that was not more than realised in the system which Lycurgus had established in Sparta in times of immemorial antiquity, which had been implicitly and unswervingly submitted to by many generations of Spartan citizens, and which had given their state a permanence and steadiness such as no other community had rivalled. 'The austere rule of any association,' it has been justly said, 'the most violent reforms decreed by the National Convention, the harmonic utopias of the Owenists, and in recent times, the adventurous preachings of Saint-Simonism, have nothing to compare with the laws of Lycurgus in point of hardihood and originality. They seem to be the dream of a visionary, rather than the fruit of the meditations of a statesman, and yet they had a prolonged existence and penetrated

(1) *Legg.*, iii. 702. c.

(2) Grote's *Pla'o*, iii. pp. 209-10.

sufficiently deep into the manners of a celebrated nation to take a permanent place in the history of science.'¹

To this encouraging influence, I think we may add another, to be found in the Grecian practice, illustrated by this very case of Kleinias, of sending out bodies of colonists to found new communities, headed by commissioners who should fix the site, plan the streets, and frame the ordinances of a constitution. Plato and Aristotle have constantly been reproached, and in one sense deservedly, with making too little allowance for the working of long established sentiment and custom, and starting from a platform cleanly swept and void. For this attitude, however, they had the excellent excuse that such a start was practically made, every time a band of settlers went forth from the mother country to found a colony in some distant spot, isolated from familiar influences, and associated with no pre-existing order which they were bound to respect. They carried with them, it is true, in their own characters the ideas, beliefs, and sentiments in which they had been trained; but a theorist might be pardoned for assuming that the blankness and unfamiliarity of surrounding circumstances, on the one hand, and the strong will of a philosophical lawgiver, on the other, might readily be the means of reducing the resistance of previous usage to so low a degree, as to leave the formation of the new institutions a process as nearly arbitrary, as the constructor of utopias had any occasion to postulate. For instance, the precepts which Aristotle lays down for the construction of his ideal state might not unfairly be described as practical advice to commissioners, starting at the head of an expedition to found a rich colony, and not a mere city in the land of the fabled Hyperboreans.² This consideration, then, in addition to

(1) Blanqui's *Hist. de l'Economie Politique*, i. 48.

(2) See the Fourth Book of the *Politics*, from chapter iv.

that which Mr. Grote has justly stated, namely, that Sparta exhibited a spectacle far more strange and extraordinary than the wildest theorist would dare to invent, may mitigate the sense of unreality with which these speculations are surrounded to the modern vision, while they partly reconcile us to what would otherwise be the flagrant philosophical error, of supposing that a constitution can be planted full-grown, without reference to the inherited idiosyncrasies of individuals, or the foregoing circumstances of the community.

To return from this parenthesis to the Platonic conception of the natural history of society which is found in the *Laws*, and which differs in several respects from that in the *Republic*. In the first place it is free from the defect, which has been already indicated in the previous conception, of omitting to take into account the successive stages through which the tribe has to pass on its way to the settled life of the town. The nameless Athenian, who is the chief expositor in the dialogue, lays down no theory upon the first beginning of social life, and appears unable to grasp the idea of there ever having been such a beginning. He does not get beyond the notion of cycles or *periodoi*, whose commencement and end are marked by some violent and destructive natural catastrophe, such as a deluge, an earthquake, or a plague.¹ When such a catastrophe as this has come to pass, then only a few people are left on the hill-

(1) *Legg.*, iii. 677. A. In the *Timæus* and *Critias* Attica is represented as having, a certain number of thousands of years before, been inhabited by a brave, prosperous, and consummately organised community, the admiration and envy of all other lands (*Crit.*, 109. c.—112. x). But there came earthquakes and floods, and nearly the whole of these people perished in a single day and night,—in the same catastrophe which sunk the great island of Atlantis below the ocean for ever. (*Timæus*, 25. c. d.) See also the *Politics*, p. 272.

Aristotle, speaking of the founder of a community, says, *ἐκ γηγενέων ἤσαν, ἢ ἐκ φθορᾶς τινὸς ἐσώθησαν*, whether as aborigines, or as the survivors of some destructive catastrophe. (*Pol.*, II. viii. 21.)

tops, stripped of all the instruments which their forerunners had accumulated, and ignorant of the metal-working arts by which these might be replaced, without city, or polity, or established ordinances. By what steps, then, does this rude and helpless band advance to the complex, manifold, and graciously adorned existence of men in a fully developed community? The process at any rate, we may be pretty sure, will be a slow one, effecting little by little, and extending over a very long period of time.¹ Each cycle is made up of a number of successive stages or divisions.² First, there are patriarchally administered households, such as Homer has described,

τοῖσιν δ' οὐτ' ἀγοραί βουλευφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες,
ἀλλ' οἳ γ' ὑψηλῶν ὀρίων ναίουσι κάρηνα
ἐν σπείσιν γλαφυροῖσι, θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος
παίδων ἢ δ' ἀλόχων, οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσιν.³

By and by a number of these households, or the clans which in the course of a few generations they come to compose, unite in one larger community, impelled by the need of mutual aid, in building walls for instance to keep off the wild beasts from their flocks and herds.⁴ Then for a congregation of this kind there must be legal and established regulations; these will be fixed by certain chosen persons, who after surveying the customs and ordinances of all the clans thus brought together, will select such out of the number as seem most satisfactory to

(1) *Legg.*, 678. v. κατὰ σμικρὸν ἐν παμπόλλῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ. And again (683. a.), ἐν χρόνῳ τινὶ μῆκεσιν ἀπλείους.

(2) *μέρη*. Ibid. 680. a.

(3) Ibid. 680. v. Probably the first time that these now well-used lines were employed in the way of historic evidence. *Ξυμμαρτυρεῖ γάρ*, says the Athenian, of the poet whom he has just quoted, καὶ λάβωμιν γε αὐτὸν μνηνυτήν, ὅτι τοιαῦται πολιτεῖαι γίνονται ποτε. (680. v.)

(4) In Protagoras's myth (*Protag.*, 322), before men were endued with the political art or quality, enabling them to combine for purposes of defence, the race was in danger of being destroyed by the wild animals.

themselves; and will proceed to organise the sovereign authority, centring it either in an aristocracy of some sort, or else in a kingship of some sort.¹

If this speculation had been placed immediately before the account of the growth of a community given in the *Republic*, then the two together would have formed a tolerably satisfactory explanation of the genesis and development of societies, if we leave out of account the figment of the self-repeating cycles, caused by overwhelming physical disasters, occurring at long intervals. Socrates, as we have seen, begins at a social state corresponding to what is the third stage in the theory of the nameless Athenian. He assumes that their natural requirements have somehow drawn a body of men together into a form of social union, and starting from this point he proceeds to describe the conditions which would lead to the division of employments, to the growth of certain habits and usages, and finally to the rise of war and the necessity for a class of specially trained warriors and rulers. The Athenian in the *Laws* traces the course of a society back to its most rudimentary phase, when men have no implements, no industrial arts, no towns, no generally binding laws, and when the community is nothing wider than the patriarchal household ruled by the decrees of the house-master or father. From the household we advance to the clan; and from the clan to the more extended community, which gradually acquires all the adornments of refined life, and needs the guiding hand of the lawgiver, and the authority which his wisdom places over them.

Let me repeat that the Athenian dwells more than once on the slowness with which these great social transformations take place, and the length of time which they occupy. It was his powerful and capacious imagination which enabled Plato to

(1) *Protag.*, 681. c. d.

measure on this scale the tremendous wilderness of barbarism, which men had to traverse before they could reach the regions of social refinement and political order. If the reader will turn to the corresponding passages in the great work of Aristotle, to which we shall come very shortly, he will see the same idea of the nature of the progress, but so cramped, compressed, and robbed of all perspective, as to lose much of its significance and even truth.¹ Just as in estimating geological periods, so we need a vigorous stimulus to the imagination, to be able to picture the long ages that go to the rooting of a moral idea, or the transition from one state of society to another which comes after it.

In the dialogue entitled the *Statesman*, as in the *Laws*, and in the *Timæus*, there is a not very definite nor elaborated assumption, that the beginning of society in earliest epochs was the result of the direct control of the gods. Here too, as elsewhere, the creator is supposed to have grown weary of the work of his hands, and to have let the universe roll through space as it might, just as a steersman might let go the helm, because his time was up, or out of something like caprice; which is very characteristic of the lively Greek conception of the nature of their deities, as contrasted with that devout awe and humility, which traced the corresponding catastrophe in the Hebrew myth to the unworthiness of man, and the just and moral displeasure of the God.

Before this abandonment by the divine powers, and while Kronos still ruled the world, each community had its own divine governor, who supplied it with all needful things. When this blissful stage came to an end, then men, weak and unprotected, were torn by the beasts who were now grown savage; and being destitute either of arts or implements, they

(1) *Politics*, I. ii.

were sorely pressed to procure from the earth that sustenance which it had in former times supplied with spontaneous plenty. Some of the gods, however, who had formerly been as shepherds to the human flock, remained near in these dire straits, and gave to men fire, the mechanical arts, seeds and plants, and instruction such as was needful for life. Since then men have made way against the difficulties of their lot as they best could.¹

It was hardly to be expected, in times when speculation was so saturated with the idea of Nature, that political thought, more than any other, should escape from the airy meshes of this fell divinity, most inimical of all to the discovery of positive truth. In the eighteenth century, the conception of social justice as the original condition and naturally imposed law of primal communities, enlarged and illustrated by the mischievous and fascinating eloquence of Rousseau, arrested the course of the fruitful, though too partial, movement of the Economists, and checked the development of the true historic process of investigating societies. In Greece in the fourth century before the Christian era, we have a glimpse of a very different, but not less misleading, notion of the relation between Nature and Justice. The most rudimentary thinking upon the first conditions of the social union brings us to reflect upon the foundations of moral obligation, upon the source, in other words, of the commonly accepted and deeply drawn distinction between right and might. What were the relations of these two forces to one another before the social union organised itself? What kind of modification of their first relations is it that has taken place, in harmony with the growing complexity of the social structure?

(1) *Politicus*, 268. D—274. E. The reader will find some useful remarks upon the difference between this and the other Platonic myths in Mr. Lewis Campbell's elaborate edition of the *Sophistes and Politicus*: see the *Introduction to the Statesman*, Sect. III. p. xxxiv.

That this is a fundamental question in the political science, will be clear to any one who observes that the degree of the completeness of the supremacy of justice, or as it might be put, the organisation of power with an exclusive regard to general and equal well-being, is the test of the success with which a community has reached the ends of its existence as such. Now an immoral interlocutor in the *Gorgias* is made to identify right with might, and to oppose this natural justice to the justice of convention in established law and usage, which has its origin in the desire of the weaker to protect themselves against the stronger. 'By nature,' says Callicles, 'everything is morally unseemly in proportion as it is actually evil;¹ to suffer injustice, therefore, is naturally unseemly, but by convention to do injustice is held unseemly. . . . Those who establish the laws are the weak majority. It is, accordingly, with reference to themselves, and to their own interest, that they award praise and inflict blame; for instance, inasmuch as they are afraid of those who are more vigorous and could acquire more than their neighbours, in order to prevent them from thus acquiring too much, they say that to be covetous is unseemly and unjust, and that injustice consists in seeking to possess more than other people. . . . Now nature, as I take it, clearly shows that it is just for the better man to possess more than the worse, and the stronger than the weaker. In many cases, she makes it plain that this is so, not only in the case of other creatures, but also among whole races and communities of men. Otherwise, what standard of justice did Xerxes adopt when he invaded Hellas? Or his father when he attacked the Scythians? Or in a thousand other instances? Why, clearly such conduct is in

(1) φάσει μὲν γὰρ πᾶν αἰσχρόν ἐστι, ὅπερ καὶ κάκιον. 'Unseemly' is not strong enough for αἰσχρόν, but it perhaps preserves a tinge of that æsthetic colour, which hung about the Greek moral terms, καλόν and αἰσχρόν.

harmony with the justice that is according to nature, and not with the justice according to law.'¹ There is much more in the same coarse and trenchant temper. The gist of it all, from the political as distinct from the moral point of view, is that Nature's justice is that they should take who have the power, and that the weaker people craftily banded themselves together, and set up a justice of their own and in their own interest. Socrates replies with perfect appropriateness that the latter kind of justice is fully as entitled to be considered natural as the other kind, for are not the majority, though individually weak, collectively the stronger? Are not, therefore, the decrees of the majority those of the stronger? And are they not, then, good according to nature? Now the majority pronounce it a more unseemly thing to do wrong than to suffer wrong, which is thus a declaration according to nature; so that there is in truth no discrepancy between what is just according to nature, and what is just according to law or institution.²

Unfortunately the subject is abandoned at this point, with nothing shown beyond the comparatively barren truth enunciated by Socrates, who carries on the principle laid down by Callicles, that the institutions of society are as truly natural as the violence and lawlessness of the natural or præ-social state; in other words, that the right of might is not more natural, when the might is the superior strength of an individual or a family, than when it is the superior strength of the majority organised for its own protection, severally and collectively, against the attacks of the powerful individual. This is for us the least interesting side of the question. We know that all the elements of complex order are as natural as the violence of savage tribes; that rigorous subordination of self to the con-

(1) *Gorgias*, 482. B.—483. E.

(2) *Ibid.* 488. C.—489. B.

ditions of the common well-being is as natural, as the unbridled passion of the freebooter or the Napoleonic despot. But the natural quality of laws and social usage is a far less fruitful object of investigation, than the many half-opened questions in private, and still more in international, morals, which depend for their right solution on a clear and intelligent appreciation of the fact that the foundation of law is superiority of sovereign force. It is startling to think how much speculative and practical confusion has come of the mistaken conception of the naturalness of laws, extending as it does over all the senses and applications, proper, analogous, or metaphorical, which the name of law has had fastened upon it. Socrates, however, went no further than we have seen; and the reply which he here makes to Callicles, as to the contribution furnished by nature to the establishment of human society and the laws which hold it together, is nicely consistent with the explanations, given elsewhere, of that need of protection against wild animals and lawless men, which first drives the family into clanship, the clan into tribeship, and so on up to the Polis. Still one may lament that Plato never took up in any other dialogue the points implied in the question of Callicles as to the justice of Xerxes's invasion of Greece, or Darius's invasion of Scythia. The application of the Elenchus to the popular notions of morality in international dealings would have exposed at least as many cloudy ideas and erroneous assumptions in this region, as in any other department of opinion; and there is unfortunately no reason to suppose that we are in any less need of such revision and explication now, than the Athenians were. What was the least advanced branch of the theory of morals then, still remains so.

We may say generally then that, with reference to the

origin and foundations of society, we find in the Platonic writings the following notions : first, at the remotest commencement of things a divine creation and direct divine supervision ; second, destructive cataclysms, overwhelming these Saturnian communities, and leaving behind them isolated and timorous families dwelling on the tops of the hills in barbarism and paralysing apprehension ; third, the gradual coalition of these families for purposes of common protection ; fourth, the rise of different crafts and industries, the drawing up of laws, and the growth of international relations, commercial and friendly, or aggressive and hostile, all in obedience to the material wants of the race, and the changed circumstances which the satisfaction of these wants naturally involved. It was not until the eighteenth century that any material advance was made upon this general conception, and then the step taken mainly affected the notion of the first stage of social existence, which began to be considered apart both from creation and from cataclysms. Each of these two mythic elements disappeared, and it gradually became clear, with a light that has gone on broadening ever since, that in the rudest times, as in those which are most closely under our own observation, the operation of the same positive principle of the Conditions of Existence fixed the economic state, regulated the degree of development, and gave shape to the social union.

Before leaving the consideration of this side of the Platonic writings, it is proper to mark the consciousness, shown in a well-known part of the *Republic*, of a fixed and predictable order of succession, in that important portion of the social state to which forms of government belong. Having brought the constitution of his community to perfection, Socrates proceeds to warn his hearers that this perfection will not endure, for ' difficult as it is for a city, thus consummately established, to

be revolutionised or disturbed, yet destruction awaits all things that ever come into being.'¹ Plants and animals are subject to orderly alternations of fruitfulness and sterility, and it is the same with political constitutions. For nobody surely fancies that such constitutions spring out of oaks or rocks; on the contrary, they are the products of the moral and social dispositions of the citizens who comprise the society, and therefore they vary with the changes in these dispositions.² As the prevailing type of character in a society undergoes alteration, there will be a corresponding alteration in the type of constitution.³ Circumstances will change the character of the citizens, and this will lead to change in the form of government. The state will pass through a series of these twofold modifications, and from being perfectly organised, or, as we have seen, aristocratic in the true sense, will degenerate first into a timocracy, in which the energetic, ambitious, and military type will become dominant; second, into an oligarchy or narrow plutocracy, where power is concentrated in the hands of a few rich men or families; thirdly, the city will pass from the oligarchic to the democratic type; and finally, the extravagance into which the freedom of democracy surely degenerates, in time drives the state into despotism, which is the worst and most wretched of political conditions, as the despotic individual is the worst and most miserable of all characters.⁴

The long passage, in which these successive steps in ethical and political depravation are traced out, is one of the most striking and forcible in the Platonic writings. We are in this place, however, only concerned with it on a single side, and its

(1) *Rep.*, viii. 516. A.

(2) *Ib.* 544. n.

(3) *Ibid.* *οὐθ' οὖν, ἣν δ' ἐγώ, θεῖ καὶ ἀνθρώπων εἶδη τοσαῦτα ἀνάγκη τρέπων εἶναι, θεσπερ καὶ πολιτειῶν.*

(4) viii. p. 517, down to ix. p. 580.

political sagacity is as truly remarkable as any other aspect of it. It would have been well for mankind, as well as for the credit of social philosophy through the greater part of its course, if subsequent generations of thinkers had avoided, as intelligently as Plato avoided it, the fatal blunder of believing that form of government is the independent and cardinal force in a society, and the corresponding blunder in practice, of acting on the supposition that to subvert an executive system, or even only to change its name or the persons of its administrators, is straightway to regenerate a community and turn back the flood of ever-accumulating social traditions, prepossessions consecrated by long usage, and material arrangements, deriving from use and passionate interest combined, volume and force only to be resisted by such a revolution as should go much deeper than the substitution of one kind of magistrate or one dynasty for another. Change is produced by a modification, that spreads through all the composing elements of any given social state. Each form of government, according to Plato, has its own characteristic principle; ambition or *militarismus*, wealth, respect for the equal claims of the individual, or unrestrained personal or family supremacy. This principle is in each case the weakness, as well as the strength, of the system, for men lean too heavily upon it, and push it to excess. But the precise direction of this excess is fixed by a double movement, the two sides of which change places according to the stage of the society's development. The first is a moral or ethological movement, gradually changing the type of character in the class most powerfully affected by the governing system, and most closely connected with it, in obedience to the tendencies of human nature as played upon by the various surrounding circumstances. The second is a material or economic movement, affecting the accumulation and distri-

bution of property. In the transition from a military to a plutocratic society the latter is the more powerful; in the earlier transition to the military régime it is the former. Neither, however, ever acts independently of the other, nor of the régime which is gradually being abandoned. This picture of the fundamental interdependence of the successive social states, of the complex play and reaction upon one another, among moral, economical, and political forces, and of the extent to which moral change must precede effectual change in political systems, is one of the most admirable pieces in the literature of social philosophy, and it was never improved upon, so far as I am aware, until the appearance of Comte's great work.¹

The criticism in Aristotle's *Politics* of Plato's ideas upon the succession of governments is unfortunately pronounced by the most competent authorities to be in parts incurably obscure, and some portions of it seem to refer to a version of Socrates's words which we do not possess. Where it is intelligible, what Aristotle says is just, his objections turning upon the want of variety, fulness, and detail, in Socrates's account of each form of government, and upon the insufficiency in detail. Oligarchies and democracies are of various kinds, he says; yet, for all that, Socrates describes their revolutions, as if each of them were single, definite, or uniform. In the same way, though the causes of revolution are manifested, he only describes one; namely, the impoverishment through debauchery and consequent neediness of citizens once rich; as if all or most of the

(1) The languid reader who is not inclined to study the whole of this notable passage (from the opening of the 8th book of the *Republic* down to p. 580 of the 9th book), will perhaps do well to confine his attention simply to the account of the transition from Oligarchy to Democracy, viii. 555. B—558. C.

citizens had been rich to begin with.¹ This objection, however, does not seriously impair the value and breadth of Plato's general conception of the movement of politics, nor lessen its superiority over Aristotle's single generalisation on the subject, that faction arises from inequality in property.²

Plato's merit is the more remarkable, if we remember, not only how limited was the field of historic experience accessible to the observation of the thinker at this time, but how far removed every thinker must then have necessarily been from the habit of expecting to find law, such a habit as the success of physical inquiries has stamped into adequately trained minds in modern times. The latter is the more important consideration of the two; for, to take a single instance, the uniformity of the prime transition in the government of so great a number of distinct communities, when the heroic kings were replaced by oligarchies, was of itself quite remarkable enough to suggest the idea of historic law, to an intelligence prepared to receive it.

No side of social theory is of more importance in its effects upon political practice, than the precise amount of plasticity which it ascribes to the beliefs and opinions of a community. A multitude of cardinal questions in politics, bearing on the expedient limitations of legislative functions, on state education, on the division between the temporal and spiritual powers of a society, are to be decided according to the more or less of this pliability, which we assume to mark men's sentiments and beliefs under the influence of civil institutions. Nor is there any more interesting topic of consideration than the conditions which have secured the acceptance of this or that current

(1) *Politics*; last chapter of Bk. V. (or Bk. VIII. according to the most modern arrangement).

(2) διὰ τὸ ἀνίστον ἢ ὀλίγους. V. (or VIII.) i. 11.

opinion by a community. If Plato does not anywhere go in detail into the natural history of opinion, he goes far enough in one place to warrant us in ranking him with those thinkers, who have held the doctrine of the artificiality of opinion in its fullest extent. This is where, in the constitution of the ideal Republic, Socrates insists on the necessity of the popular acceptance of the fictitious legend, that while the common citizens were sprung directly from the earth, with only an admixture of iron in their composition, those who were fit for the rank of ruler had an admixture, not of iron, but of gold, and those who were fit for the rank of guardian had, not iron nor gold, but silver.¹ But how, it is asked, can any means be devised for persuading, if not the ruling orders in the state, at any rate the bulk of the community, that all this is true?² Socrates admits the difficulty with respect to an existing generation, but implies that if rumour or common report could once spread it, then 'the sons of living people, and the generation after them, and all the others to come,' would certainly be firmly persuaded; *καὶ ταῦτο μὲν δὴ ἔξει ὁππῶς ἂν αὐτὸ ἡ φήμη ἀγάγῃ*. There were, he urges, examples of such fictions being propagated in earlier times, and taking firm root in the popular mind, and their currency must have been due to some such process as this. The same faith in the potency of the ruling class over the opinions of the multitude must have prompted that other

(1) *Rep.*, III. 414-15. Socrates works the legend out, in a way that prevents it from countenancing the myth of exclusively hereditary governing power, which there has been no difficulty in persuading real communities to accept.

(2) The agent sent by the King of France to protest against putting Mary of Scotland to death, backed his remonstrance, we are told, by gravely reminding Elizabeth of the words of Plato, that common mortals are of iron, while the material of kings is gold. This, which may possibly have been no more than a rhetorical decoration on Belèvre's part, is not more unjust to Plato, than a great deal of seriously intended philosophical criticism on his supposed prescription of a universal community of wives, property, and so forth.

passage in the same book of the *Republic*, to which reference has already been made in this volume,¹ where Socrates speaks of false notions being, under certain circumstances, of the nature of medicine, and just as the administration of medicine is exclusively entrusted to physicians, so the dissemination of these falsehoods should be controlled by the governing order, and confined to that only.²

It will be observed that if Plato assumes the extreme plasticity of society in one sense, in another sense he implies an equally strong conviction of its stability. For though his citizens might, in the first instance, receive with perfect faith any fiction which the rulers, using tricks of supernatural inspiration and the like, might think fit to impose on them, yet in the next and all subsequent generations these fictions would have struck too deep a root, to run any risk of being displaced. It is clear that in both of these assumptions, in one as much as the other, Plato was led by the current speculative idea of the omnipotence first of the Legislator, and then of the Nomos, to overlook the application of that great principle of Adaptability, which had given him so much light in understanding the origin of the division of labour, and the other facts of a growing community. He overlooked, as many hundred years afterwards did Saint Just, and the other truly Athenian lawgivers of the French Revolution, those forces in human nature which limit so rigorously, according to circumstances and time, both the moulding power of new positive law, on the one hand, and the sovereignty of old tradition, on the other. Neither new law nor old opinion practically survives, after its discrepancy with the leading social and intellectual conditions of the time has

(1) *Antea*, p. 99.

(2) *Rep.*, III. 389. B. This is virtually the modern latitudinarian, or ecclesiastical sceptic's, argument for a state church.

made itself felt. For example, in a society where the exposure of new-born infants was not repugnant to common sentiment, it was a simple matter for Plato to urge on his legislator to take measures for keeping the number of households within the fixed limits, or up to them, by checking propagation, or encouraging it.¹ But where opinion is averse to the deliberate destruction of new-born infants, as it is in modern societies, as well as deeply suspicious of all counsels of self-restraint, as it is in societies where Christianity in either of its two main forms retains a real hold, here no amount of hortatory effort, or direct and positive law-making, on the part of the ruler would count for anything. Yet it would have saved many huge folios of futile discussion, if every thinker since Plato had agreed with him, that positive law is the progenitor of the most deeply rooted ideas, and that the mass of a society's convictions rest on no more intellectually defensible basis than that of inheritance.

III.

In Aristotle's contributions to speculative politics, the discussion turns so much more upon the conditions of stable society, than upon the conditions of movement, is so nearly exclusively statical and so little concerned with any dynamical aspect, that a very few pages will suffice for them. We have already referred cursorily to some of his ideas on the origin of society. The chapter in which he treats of this subject is not very long, and may be as well partially reproduced in the philosopher's own words, as summarised.

'Now it is necessary first of all that there should be a union between those who cannot be without one another, as male and female, for the sake of propagation: and this without any

(1) *Legg.*, v. 740. D.

deliberate choice, for in them, as in the other creatures and plants, the impulse to leave a second self is an impulse of nature. Then from this it comes, for the sake of preservation, that there is one of the two naturally master, and the other naturally obedient. Now that there is a master by nature is clear, for that which has judgment and foresight is master and lord by nature, while that which is liable to do the will of the other is servile by nature. This distinction fits the difference between master and slave. It is nature, then, who has defined female and slave. For nature never acts penuriously, like the manufacturers of the Delphian knife, made for many uses, but she creates each for its own particular purpose. For this is the condition of each instrument answering its purpose, that it should not serve many uses, but only one. . . .

‘So from these two forms of union, the male and the female, and master and slave, comes the household in its simplest form. . . . The association, therefore, existing for satisfying everyday needs is naturally the *Household*. It is the union of those who are called by Charondas, fellow-eaters, and by Epimenides the Cretan, hearth-fellows. The association, formed of several Households for purposes beyond the wants of the day, is the *Village*. The specially natural kind of Village is that composed of a settlement from a Household—the association of those who as some term it, are suckled from the same milk, their children and children’s children. For this reason, communities were in the first instance under the government of a patriarchal king, just as foreign peoples are now. For they were made up of persons under such government, inasmuch as each Household is ruled over by the eldest, as also are the settlements from it, because of their kinship. . . .

‘Now the association finally formed from a number of Villages is a *City*, which attains the limit of the full satisfaction

of our wants, first springing into being that the members of it might live, while it continues that they may live rightly. Thus every City is natural, exactly as the earlier associations were. For this is their consummation, and nature means consummation, since what anything is when its growth is consummated, that we say it is by nature in each case, whether it be man, or horse, or family.'¹

The end of this is the presentation of the City as the integral organism, and this organism by nature precedes alike the individual and the family, because the whole is necessarily precedent of the part, and if you take away the whole there can no longer be foot nor hand.² With the influence, which this firmly sustained idea of the state, as the whole and unit, had upon Aristotle's ethical conceptions, we are not here concerned, and it is only interesting historically to point out that, owing to the supremacy in European thought of the individualist ideas which Christianity carried in with it, the necessity of studying a society in its ensemble, even when we seek to know a set of truths respecting a single side of it, fell out of view until the beginning of the present century, and is even now denied by thinkers with an exaggerated tendency to specialisation.

Rational and modern as it is on the whole, Aristotle's account of the origin of society is obviously not such as the writer of any treatise, corresponding in its design to the *Politics*, would now follow or imitate. It is entirely conjectural, for one thing, though the one or two quotations from Homer may be taken to indicate a sense of the need for historic evidence. It is substantially no more than a series of symmetric assumptions. Secondly, it involves the notion that the process of the formation of the City has been universally the same, and that one account would

(1) *Politics*, I. ii.

(2) *Ibid.*, I. ii. 12, 13.

serve for every instance alike. There is no reason to suppose that as a matter of fact the conditions of primitive life have everywhere remained so identical, that the transformation of the Village into the City has everywhere come to pass through one set of agencies. If, in some cases, a number of villages formed themselves into a city for protection's sake against animals, or for facility of exchange of goods, or in any other voluntary and spontaneous manner, there must be many cases of a different kind, where union was imposed by some conqueror from without, or by some violent oppressor from among the members of their own communities. This assumption of uniformity in the sources of the more striking facts of primitive societies, is still a defect in speculation; as when philosophers seek, and are content with, one particular origin of the Totem gods of rude tribes, whereas there is every probability that the origins and significance of Totem-worship were various; or as when the economists set out by describing an invariable and uniform transition from fishing and hunting to the pastoral stage, and from that to the agricultural stage, whereas it seems neither inherently impossible, nor contradicted by what we know, that a tribe might pass direct from the hunting to the agricultural stage.

Again, Aristotle is guilty of the fatal omission to take community of gods into account; this in reality being not any less essential in the constitution of the Village, and hardly any less so, where the growth of the City out of several villages has been spontaneous, and not the fruit of conquest, than the fact of possessing one or a series of common ancestors and patriarchal rulers. Whatever may have been the case when the primitive family first acquired coherence, it is not to be doubted that, in course of time, the patriarchal authority was closely associated with the worship of the family

gods, and was indebted to this for its most important attributes. There is perhaps a hint of the true view, but a crude and inadequate one, in Aristotle's account of the rise of the heroic kings, as having been in the first instance the benefactors of the multitude, either by instructing them in arts, or leading them in war, or acquiring territory, and so being voluntarily accepted as rulers, and transmitting to their sons, not only their military, but their sacrificial offices. This, however, throws the vital fact of all into a parenthesis.¹

Let us notice in a word two of the many pregnant sentences that stud this chapter. First, the reader will observe that Aristotle's description of the City, as arising out of the necessities of living, but existing that men may live rightly,² exactly corresponds with Kant's account of the exaltation of the social concert, extorted pathologically from mere necessities of situation, into a moral union.³ The second is one to which reference has already been made: 'While there is in all of us by nature an impulse to join such a union as has been described, it is still true that he who first organised men in union conferred the greatest benefits on them.'⁴ This sentence is remarkable, not

(1) *Politics*, III. xiv. 12. κύριοι ἦσαν τῆς τε κατὰ πόλεμον ἡγεμονίας καὶ τῶν θυσιῶν, ὅσαι μὴ ιερατικαί. There is no reference to the essentially hieratic monarchies.

(2) γινόμενην μὲν οὖν τοῦ ζῆν ἕνεκεν, οὐσα δὲ τοῦ εὖ ζῆν. (I. ii. 8).

(3) Antea, p. 88.

(4) ὁ δὲ πρῶτος συστήσας μεγίστων ἀγαθῶν αἴτιος. ὥσπερ γὰρ καὶ τελεωθὲν βέλτιστον τῶν ζῶντων ἀνθρωπός ἐστιν, οὕτω καὶ χωρισθὲν νόμου καὶ δίκης χείριστον πάντων (I. ii. 16). Compare what Hume says: 'Of all men that distinguish themselves by memorable achievements, the first place of honour seems due to legislators and founders of states. . . . I must regard antiquity as somewhat unjust in its distribution of honours, when it made gods of all the inventors of useful arts, such as Ceres, Bacchus, Æsculapius; and dignified legislators, such as Romulus and Theseus, only with the epithet of demi-gods and heroes.'—*Essay, Of Parties in General*.

merely as a repudiation, not less emphatic for being undesigned, of the later doctrine of the superiority of some imagined state of nature under the imagined law of nature, but much more so as a recognition of the indispensable part which has been played by individuals of superior political capacity, in making the spontaneous social quality of men effective for its own ends and final aims. It was not unnatural that this condition of social growth should be prominent in the mind of a Greek, to whom the importance of the primitive lawgiver in each state was a matter of familiar tradition: yet, as we have already seen, it was overlooked by Plato, who seems to have thought the existence of the ruler of exceptional type a secondary fact in the genesis of a society, compared with the demands made upon a readily responsive human nature by outer circumstances. It has been overlooked, also, and in equal degrees, by two chief schools of more modern times, otherwise wide as the poles asunder: by those who insist that all the radical facts of the social union, law, sovereignty, and the like, are the mysterious works of direct divine agency; and by those, again, who give to inherent impulses of the race, and dominant currents of circumstance, the supreme control of all leading movements, excluding the individual from any but a subordinate and auxiliary office.¹

It is not, therefore, precisely accurate to assert that Aristotle

(1) The reader of the *Politics* will remember that in the discussion on monarchy in the Third book, Aristotle expressly considers the case of a citizen appearing, endowed with surpassing merit. 'It would certainly not be right to exile such an one; nor yet to hold him subject, for that would be much as though in their distribution of offices they were to presume to hold Zeus subject. The only course, then, and this seems the natural course, is that all should pay to a man of that kind a joyful allegiance, and that thus such men should be kings to the end of their lives.' (III. xiv. 13). This applies not merely to primitive societies, but to a community in any stage. Aristotle, however, tells us as little as Mr. Carlyle as to mode of practical accomplishment.

was wholly unalive to the natural laws of civilisation. More than one of the most important of these laws revealed themselves to his sagacious and patient meditation. Of the dynamic principles in communities, he certainly perceived in a partial way the three most important: the innate sociality of man, the organising power of some men of exceptional quality, and the principle of Adaptation, animating and controlling this power. The defect, of course, of his social conception, so full of what is instructive in other ways, lies in its failure to include the idea of progress, either as a fact in itself, or with reference to its conditions and limitations. How great a defect this is, we may best measure by considering the space which the idea of progress fills in all the best social speculation, as in all the most enlightened social action, of modern times. Even now, it is true, there is one school of writers, numerically powerful, to whom progress, at all events since the foundation of the Catholic Church and the consolidation of the Roman headship of it, and especially since 1789, is a name of abomination and a symbol for the destruction of society. And there is, too, or perhaps it would be more correct to say there has been, an opposite school, which has treated progress as some automatic force and irresistible tendency of things in themselves, a kind of concrete divinity with fixed attributes, such as parliamentary government, free commerce, and a religion of privatives. But the most fruitful modern thought grows from a reasoned doctrine of the conditions which lead from the less developed to the more developed social state; a doctrine based upon the analysis of history, in the light of the permanent elements of human character, resulting in practical generalisations of the most strictly relative, and therefore of the most manifold kind. Of this Aristotle saw nothing, nor did any other thinker before Turgot and Condorcet, who had bright, though partial, glimpses

of it. There was not only no reasoned account, but there was no adequate recognition, of that continuity of advance, that successive series of evolutions, by which the foremost generation is as different from that which is least developed, as the maturity of the civilised individual is different from his infancy. That there had been a progressive movement it was impossible, even with so scanty a historical record, wholly to ignore, but the ruling conviction was that the limits of government, the most important of social facts in the eyes of Aristotle, had been reached, and all its varieties exhausted. To those who, living many hundred years since this great man, perceive that we have not even yet entirely so much as crossed the bare threshold of political science, there is something almost painful in that strange parenthesis which explains that all the considerations needed for correct political judgments had been discovered, though they had not always been carefully collected nor consciously applied.¹ This sentence occurs, it will be remembered, at the close of the review in the second book, not of a systematic collection of such miscellaneous facts and traditions as Herodotus and the other logographoi had compiled, but of half a dozen mere constitutions, from that of Phaleas of Chalcidon downwards. Considering the hardly less narrow and meagre survey which has been constantly mistaken for the history of a society, there is nothing to make us wonder in this, but there is in it proof positive that there was in the writer's mind no true historical conception of the broad movements of communities, in obedience to definite and measurable social forces. It is much that, without this, his acuteness and sagacity enabled him to give the highest place, among the many kinds

(1) πάντα σχεδὸν εὑρηται μὲν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν οὐ συνήεσται, τοῖς δ' οὐ χρώνται γιγνώσκοντες.—*Polit.*, II. v. 16.

and degrees of human wisdom, to the constructive political judgment.¹

It is deplorable to think that the later countrymen of Aristotle and Plato contributed nothing to social philosophy, either in its statical or its dynamical part. Their intellectual energy and speculative ingenuity were frittered away, for many generations, upon the sophistical nullities of metaphysics and metaphysical ethics, and then for many generations more upon those of metaphysical theology. The Roman Empire came and decayed, the spiritual power of the Papacy arose and was dissolved, feudal communities grew up and carried on with varying fortunes a prolonged strife in the West with monarchy, on the one hand, and industrialism on the other, and it was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the confusion of social life and the displacement of old ideas led speculative men once more to reflect systematically on the ideal state, the origin of governments, and the other rudimentary questions of the philosophy of society.

The conditions of political speculation had by then undergone the profoundest changes at the very roots. Commerce, which Aristotle disliked so much, and insisted on reducing to the position of a rather undesirable accident in states,² was rapidly acquiring a prominence among social facts, which eventually made it one of the most important regulators of the growth and movements of European communities. Slavery, which was a normal feature of all ancient societies, had disappeared before the operation of economic causes, slightly accelerated by changes in religious sentiment. Population, the strict limitation of which had always been regarded by both

(1) ἡ φρόνησις πολιτικὴ ἀρχιτεκτονική.

(2) See the passage on the sense in which the City might be *ἰμφορικὴ*, in the *Politics*, IV. vi. 4.

Plato and Aristotle as essential to the wellbeing of every state, and as one of the most important objects of the ruler's care,¹ was now transferred into the region of things beyond human control, and left to the working of physical causes and appetites. Finally, the organisation of the spiritual power in the Western Church, and its independence of temporal authorities, once real, and always maintained in theory, separated men's thoughts by a wide gulf from speculations which, like those of the Greek philosophers, always assumed, more or less, the combination of polity with education.² With the change in matter, there had come also a change in manner; and we are conscious, in the social and moral inquiries of Plato and Aristotle, of certain fine qualities, of candour, of freedom in the working of the intelligence, of closeness to fact and reality, which did not emerge in the polemicists who continued their discussions.

(1) Cf. *Politics*, II. vi. 11, vii. 5.

(2) Cf. Grote's *Plato*, iii. 169.

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORALS.

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORALS.

THE writer of a highly interesting article in a recent number of the *North British Review*¹ has revived once more, in a manner which is very far removed from commonplace, the controversy as to the comparative progressiveness of the moral and intellectual elements in mankind. Mr. Buckle, in one of the most hotly disputed portions of his book, declared that the moral element is stationary; that 'there is nothing to be found in the world which has undergone so little change as those great dogmas^a of which moral systems are composed;' and that, as civilisation does somehow advance, it must, therefore, be the intellectual element which promotes this advance. Progress depends upon increase of knowledge, and not upon the amplification of moral codes, for the simple reason that moral codes are substantially not susceptible of amplification. The elements of the moral law are very much the same at one time as at another. 'To do good to others; to sacrifice for their benefit your own wishes; to love your neighbour as yourself; to forgive your enemies; to restrain your passions; to respect those who are set over you;—these, and a few others, are the sole essentials of morals; but they have been known for thousands of years, and not one jot or tittle has been added to them by all the sermons, homilies, and text-books which moralists and theologians have been able to produce.' To this the writer

(1) No. XCV. 1868.

the circumstances of the age determine the nature and range of its application.' Or, as he has put it elsewhere, 'Moral progress consists in giving a grander sweep to the application of tenets which the old world knew, not in finding new tenets out.' The real question, therefore, is not, after all, whether there is a movement in morality, but entirely turns upon the agencies by which that movement is furthered. In what way do the circumstances of an age determine the evolution of the moral maxims which prevailed in it? What directs the course of development from the morality of one age to that of another?

The history of human advancement may be said to consist of two main processes, first the progressive elevation of what is technically called Deontology, or morality as it ought to be; next the continuous transfer of maxims which are accepted in Deontology, into the codes of positive morality, or morality as it is. In other words, human progress means, first, the multiplication and elevation of types of virtuous character; and next, the practical acceptance of these types by the general sentiment;—first, a constant raising and purifying of the ideals of virtue; next, their realisation in conduct. That is to say,

and there is not one of these propositions which any rational person now holds to be, and to have been, of universal obligation upon all persons under all circumstances at all times. We may believe that moral truth is immutable, as soon as we have found any one moral precept immutable, and not before. The writer will say, that in the most primitive time there was such a crime as murder, for instance; that even then there was a moral precept against killing persons standing in *some* relation to one. But he would admit that the precept, 'Thou shalt not kill,' is meaningless until the question has been answered, 'Thou shalt not kill *whom*?' Now nobody can say that the answer to this question is always the same. So that the only immutable part of the precept is that which is meaningless. Closely examined, people can only mean by the immutability of moral truth, that under all circumstances *there is such a thing as Duty, some* obligation incumbent on every member of a society.

moral advance in a community or a number of communities depends upon the perpetual improvement of the conception of duty, in the first place, and, in the second, upon the constant willingness of most of the members of the community to obey their conception of duty, in however rudimentary or however complex a stage it may happen to be. It is of the highest importance, in considering the natural history of Morals, to separate these two very distinct aspects and parts of morality ; for the process by which one of them arises may well be very different from that which creates the other ; and a good deal of the controversy has had its origin in a persistent confusion and identification of two barely connected sets of moral elements.

It is obvious to anybody who thinks about it, that in criticising the morality of a man's character, we consider, or at any rate we ought to consider, both the comparative elevation of his standard, and the sincerity and constancy of his efforts to conform to it. If his notions of duty are low, relatively to the average notions of his time, then the circumstance of his fidelity to this standard entitles him to no approbation. And if, on the other hand, his avowed standard is high, while he makes no proportionately strenuous endeavour to reach it in his conduct, then he not only wins no approval, but incurs censure. Of these two factors in a high moral character—a high ideal of duty, and an unhesitating willingness to sacrifice all other interests in striving to reach such an ideal—it is somehow felt, and all language testifies to the existence of the feeling, that the latter, the willingness to prefer duty, to practise the self-denial involved in its performance, to follow what seems to be right because it is right, is the more distinctively and peculiarly moral. Men are sensible (as indeed how could they fail to be ?) that there is a radical distinction between the

kind of conditions which produce this willingness to obey duty, and the kind of conditions which lead to an enlightened and elevated idea of what duty is. If it were otherwise, we should never be able, as we clearly are able, to forgive or even to praise the agent while condemning the action; to admit the morality of the motive, while pronouncing on the immorality of the action which sprang from it. For the latter depends upon the consequences of the action, and to be able justly to estimate them is felt not to be a result of virtue merely, but of wisdom, which is virtue and something besides.

The inquiry, therefore, which has been usually treated as one, is in reality twofold. The single question, by what process man's moral nature is modified, would be better studied as two questions. First, how do ethical systems arise? by what process do moral ideas expand and acquire their complexity and comprehensiveness? By what sort of process—mark, not for what *reason*—is it that certain things come to be regarded as right, and certain other things as wrong? Second, by what sort of process does the presiding general idea of Duty or Virtue acquire its high place? First, what agencies contribute to correctness and elevation in the precepts enjoined in any moral code? And, second, what agencies contribute to the growth of a very high degree of sensitiveness to the claims of duty in the persons to whom the code is delivered?

The first of these questions is much simpler than the other, and Mr. Buckle's critic has treated it very ably—in some points, indeed, which space will not allow us to discuss, very originally,—showing that social circumstances give rise to types of character, or, as it would perhaps be better to say, rules of conduct, some of which are exclusively local, while others are of more universal fitness; that the last survive, while the former pass away with the peculiar conditions from which

they arose ; in short, that 'the Natural History of Morals is the history of social conditions.' But surely this is a moral movement, which follows after, and depends upon, a purely intellectual energy. Morals, it may safely be said, are in the first instance the products of positive institutions, and these positive institutions, in turn, are the products of an intellectual discernment, in the chief or lawgiver, of the requirements of the circumstances in which his society is placed, of the consequences of certain kinds of conduct. The lawgiver forbids or enjoins given actions, and then public opinion gradually associates the ideas of praise and blame, virtue and vice, the idea of Duty, in a word, with his injunctions or prohibitions. In rude societies, right and wrong only mean what is permitted and what is forbidden by the strongest, whether the resource of the strongest be the thunders of Sinai, or the rope of a Vigilance Committee. It is not necessary that there should be a personal lawgiver, or written laws. If certain acts are not tolerated by a portion of the community with sufficient strength to put them down, that is enough, first of all, to generate the idea of Law, and by-and-by to generate further the idea of Duty. We may see the process actually going on under our eyes on the unsettled western frontier of the United States. In Texas, or Nevada, or Nebraska, you may watch the growth of the ideas of Law and Duty just as if they were plants. The process is just the same as in the old primitive societies, with the pregnant and instructive difference that no Divine sanction is appealed to. Lawless desperadoes in these frontier settlements find, after a certain experience of savagery, that on the whole it is more *convenient*, in the long run, not to rob and murder. A public opinion grows up that is hostile to these malpractices, and a willingness to unite to repress them. Then a Vigilance Committee puts theft and excessive murder down

by hanging anybody who takes another man's life or another man's property. And so, as population increases, and men's relations to one another become both closer and more extensive, other kinds of acts are put along with robbery and homicide as things that will not be endured. A legal code grows first, and the ethical code follows steadily behind it. By-and-by the ethical code expands in directions of its own; ideas begin to occupy a place in it, which are not embodied in positive law; but they win their place by the same process which preceded the earliest enactments; a process, that is, of regard, more or less conscious and deliberate, to the consequences of given pieces of conduct to everybody concerned, not excluding the character of the doer. In inquiring, therefore, into the growth of 'the complexity and majesty of moral codes,' should we not be principally engaged in observing an intellectual operation—the acquisition of a wider knowledge of effects, a keener insight into consequences, a greater power of reasoning correctly about them? Just as primitive morality grows out of consulting convenience, in its narrow sense, so later morality is the outcome of some man's mind who consults convenience, or fittingness, in its loftiest and noblest sense. The great moral reformer is simply the man who brings the healthiest and strongest intellect into questions of conduct and character, instead of into chemistry, physiology, or any other science. He is emphatically the possessor of Vision, and Vision is not the less a quality of the intelligence for being directed to moral subjects. It is the difference in the subjects on which they bring their powers to bear, not in the kind of powers employed, that makes the distinction between the man who augments the treasures of science, and the man who gives new meanings to Duty and Virtue.

One of the most impressive proofs of the dependence of this

side of morality upon intellectual movement is the fact that, where the latter does not exist, the former is stationary too. The conception of the ingredients of duty alters least where there is least intellectual activity, where there are least additions to the stock of knowledge. Other conditions, besides stationariness of knowledge, enter into stationariness of a moral system. But it is remarkably significant that where, as in Spain or in Turkey, the intellect lies very stagnant, the articles in the current ethical code remain in a similar degree unmoved and unamended. And, on the other side, when has there been a great stir in the region of knowledge which has not been followed by a stir in the region of duty? When have men known more about other things, without subsequently knowing more about duty also? The revival of learning preceded the Reformation, the latter being, in substance, quite as much a moral as a theological movement. The wonderful additions to human knowledge, which took place in France in the last century, preceded the ethical development which so amazingly distinguished the close of the century—a development to which, among other gifts, modern society is indebted for the important idea that the life of a man is of value to his fellows. In these and other cases, where mental progress has advanced by an immense stride, enlightenment in morals has followed enlightenment in scientific and literary knowledge. Moral dogmas do thus advance, but it is by intellectual processes. The articles of moral systems become refined and elevated, if not in their formal statement, still in their interpretation and application to practice. But the instruments by which this improving operation is conducted are the usual instruments of the intelligence, bent to ideas of character and conduct, instead of to the themes of art, physics, history, or any of the other objects of understanding.

But let us turn to the other side of morality. If it is as clear as Mr. Buckle held it to be, and as his critic's theory of the natural history of morals equally implies, that it is by intellectual deliberation, by rational argument, by all the agencies of an instructed understanding, that the objects of moral conviction become purer, loftier, more conformable to the requirements of contemporary circumstance, it is certainly not by these agencies also, not by them only, that a corresponding quickening of moral sensitiveness takes place. In this region, to instruct the understanding is to do very little. Arguments are not adequate to the task of making men more willing to do their duty. Reasoning is never strong enough of itself to beget a love of virtue. The scales fall from the eyes of him who has been blind to Duty by what is, to mere intelligence, a miracle. The philosopher who adds new aims to the moral creed raises them by means of the width and fulness of his vision. To him right and wrong is a distinction of the intelligence. To the many it is a distinction of feelings, affections, sympathies. Duty is a growth of that part of their nature, in which the rays of reason, when they penetrate into it, are softened and suffused by a thousand elements of prejudice, sympathy, and association. The love of duty, virtue, holiness, or by whatever name we call this powerful sentiment, exists independently of argument. St. Bernard was in instruction of understanding very inferior to Abélard, yet he stirred the love of duty, as duty was then conceived, in the breast of every one who came within his influence, and filled his age with moral heroism. And so at most times, the preacher who is most powerfully able to excite the love of virtue, is least competent to enlarge the ingredients and elevate the standard of virtue. The aims which St. Bernard extolled as virtuous, and the obligations which he imposed, were not new. Other great

saints had proclaimed exactly the same moral convictions. He did nothing to advance the theory of conduct. His contribution, and the contribution of men of his type, consists in stimulating men to more enthusiastic willingness to rise in practice to the requirements of the theory they accept. There have been men, like Plato, endowed enough both with the intellectual quality of vision to add new discoveries to the theory of right conduct, and at the same time with delicate and sympathetic *ῥησος*, to communicate to every listener, with the faintest susceptibility to moral impressions, a new and energetic impulse in the direction of virtue and duty. Alas the great teachers of this class are too soon numbered.

The scientific historian of civilisation commits a stupendous error who leaves out of his account, among the potent agencies of mental progress, both this non-intellectual capacity in the teacher of quickening and exalting the love of virtue, and this non-intellectual sensibility to virtuous aspirations. Yet, in one sense, it might obviously be said of this moral element, that it is stationary. It is stationary in *quality*. Strong spiritual emotion is just the same mood in kind at one time as at another. It is just the same thing in Plato as in St. Paul; in the Corinthian husbandman, who was struck with such admiration at the *Gorgias*, that he abandoned his fields and his vines to sit at the feet of its author, as in Cornelius, who sent for Simon Peter to teach him and his household. A virtuous Roman was as solicitous to do his duty as a virtuous Frenchman is; that the precise objects of their solicitude should vary, makes no difference in the essential character, does not affect the substantial identity of their solicitude. But, in another sense, this moral element is so far from being stationary that its fluctuations mark the most decisive conditions of the decline and advance of human civilisation and happiness. Always the

same in quality, sense of duty is constantly changing in *quantity*. The amount of it in different communities, or in the same community at different periods, varies infinitely; sometimes we may contemplate a whole nation of heroes, at another we may behold it sunk in corruption. The difference between the two stages measures the distance between the maximum and the minimum amounts of moral enthusiasm. The immediate cause of the decline of a people is nearly always a decline in the quantity of its conscience, not a depravation of its theoretical ethics. The Greeks became corrupt and enfeebled, not for lack of ethical science, but through the decay in the proportion of those, who were actually sensible of the reality and force of ethical obligations. The Mahometans were triumphant over Christians at Constantinople and in Spain, not because their scheme of duty was more elevated or comprehensive, but because their respect for duty was more strenuous and fervid. Hence, when we are told that 'low moral types are constantly making room for high,' it can only be accepted in the sense of a low or high degree of subjective sincerity, not of objective elevation.

Viewed in this light, we may notice parenthetically, the much vaunted triumph of justice in human affairs is seen to be something very like a truism. That 'wrong-doing brings ruin' is self-evident, as soon as we have agreed that wrong is non-conformity to the requirements of the surrounding conditions. There is nothing morally penal, no retributive justice, in the sufferings of the children for the sins of the parent. Indeed, to call this vicarious visitation of the offences of the guilty upon the heads of the innocent by the name of justice, retributive or otherwise, is about as strange a twist of a moral idea to suit a theological anachronism, as one may find in the history of thought. Define the high moral type as that which best meets

the requirements of the situation, and it flows from the very definition that the low moral type will fall before it, and be visited by ruin. Inferior morals, arising either from inferior vision of what social circumstances demand, or else from an indifference in the heart to the lessons of sight, must inevitably subject a man at least to the risk of a fatal clash. But when people say that God is not a God that hideth himself, that justice is supreme on the earth, that in the long-run even here it is well with the good and ill with the wicked, is this all that they mean, and all that they want us to believe?

To sum up. The amount of respect for duty being not a stationary, but a very constantly fluctuating element in mental progress, in order to judge whether morals as a whole are as stationary as has been alleged, one has only to consider whether this element of desire to do what seems right, equally with the other element of power in finding out what is right, only moves secondarily to, and in dependence upon, the intellectual element. We soon perceive that this is not so. Some of our feelings seem to move in an orbit of their own. Sensitiveness of conscience, lively impressionableness to considerations of duty, the capacity of quick and full response to a vigorous appeal—the quantity of this in a community varies without reference to variations in instructed intelligence. And again, the possibility of the appearance of a teacher, with the rare kindling and sympathetic power appears to be, partially independent of the general intellectual conditions of the time. These will determine within certain limits the form and tenour of his teaching, but they shed no light on the source of that *700s* about it, which is so magically attractive. The fact of this quality in the teacher happening, at certain times, so to touch the corresponding receptive quality in a great number of other people, as to produce an unusually strong vitality in moral

motives, cannot be explained at all satisfactorily by the influence of opinions and intellectual ideas. Those extraordinary expansions in the quantity of conscientious feeling, which must be admitted to be causes of social progress, must be the results of the social conditions operating on the general character.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.¹

CONDORCET'S PLEA FOR THE CITIZENSHIP OF WOMEN.

A TRANSLATION.

THE piece which I have here reproduced, with the omission of one or two sentences of no significance, was published by Condorcet on the 3rd of July, 1790, in the *Journal de la Société de MDCCLXXXIX*, and was no doubt intended to influence the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, of which he did not happen to be a member.²

It is natural that the question of the equal place of women with men in the rights of citizenship should come into prominence in times of revolution, like '89. The more profound and moral the revolutionary feeling is, the more certain is the subjection of women to arrest attention. There are at least two good reasons why this should be so. In such times men are deeply stirred by a sense of justice. And in such times they feel to an unusual degree the need of the intelligent co-operation of women. Both conditions are to be met with in those men of our own day, who are most penetrated by social sentiment, though there is marked difference among them as to the ideal of the female character, and also as to the precise way in which their action in public affairs may best make itself felt. The simplest and truest view surely is, that we have no right to

(1) Cf. *aut.*, p. 106.

(2) *Œuvres de Condorcet*, vol. x. p. 121.

deprive women of the opportunity of deciding both of these questions for themselves.

It is in the power of habit to familiarise men with the violation of their natural rights to such a degree that, among those who have lost them, nobody ever thinks of reclaiming them, or supposes himself to have suffered any wrong. There are even some of these cases of violation, which have escaped philosophers and legislators, when they were devoting themselves with most zeal to the establishment of the common rights of the members of the human race, and to the foundation in these rights, and in them only, of political institutions.

For instance, have they not every one violated the principle of the equality of rights, in tranquilly depriving the half of the human race of that of assisting in the making of law; in excluding women from the right of citizenship? Is there a stronger proof of the power of habit, even over enlightened men, than the spectacle of equality of rights being invoked in favour of three or four hundred men that an absurd prejudice had deprived of them, and being forgotten in respect of twelve millions of women? For this exclusion not to be an act of tyranny, it would be necessary either to prove that the natural rights of women are not absolutely identical with those of men, or else to show that women are incapable of exercising them.

Now the rights of men result only from this, that men are beings with sensibility, capable of acquiring moral ideas, and of reasoning on these ideas. So women, having these same qualities, have necessarily equal rights. Either no individual of the human race has genuine rights, or else all have the same; and he who votes against the right of another, whatever the religion, colour, or sex of that other, has henceforth abjured his own.

With reference to the other horn of the dilemma, it would be hard to prove that women are incapable of exercising the rights of citizenship. Why should beings to whom pregnancy and passing indispositions are incident, not be able to exercise rights, of which nobody ever dreamt of depriving people who have the gout every winter, or who easily catch cold? Again, even if we admit in men a superiority of intelligence not the necessary result of difference of education—which is as far as possible from being proved, and which ought to be proved, to enable us to deprive women of a natural right without injustice—this superiority can only consist in two points.

It is said that no woman has made an important discovery in science; nor given proofs of genius in art, literature, &c. But, we may presume, the franchise is not to be accorded only to men of genius. It is said, further, that no woman has the same range of knowledge, the same force of understanding, as certain men. But what follows from this, that, except a not very large class of highly enlightened men, there is entire equality between women and all the rest of men; that, this small class apart, inferiority and superiority are equally divided between the two sexes? Now, since it would be utterly absurd to confine to this superior class the rights of citizenship and the liability to public functions, why should we exclude women from them, any more than those among men who are inferior to a great number of women?

In short, will anybody contend that women have in intelligence or in heart any qualities that ought to exclude them from the enjoyment of their natural rights? Let us interrogate facts. Elizabeth of England, Maria Theresa, the two Catherines of Russia, proved that it was neither in strength of character nor courage of mind that women failed. Would not the rights of citizens have found a better champion at the States of 1614 in the adopted daughter of Montaigne, than in Councillor Courtin, who believed in sortilege and occult virtues? Was not the Princess des Ursins worth more than Chamillard? Would not the Marquise du Châtelet have composed a despatch as well as M. Rouillé? Would Madame de Lambert have made laws as absurd and as barbarous as those of D'Armenonville, against Protestants, thievish servants, smugglers, and negroes? As they cast an eye over the list of those who have been their rulers and law-makers, men have no right to be so lifted up.

Women are superior to men in the milder and domestic virtues; they know, as well as men, how to love liberty, though they do not share all its advantages; and in republics they have many a time sacrificed themselves for it. They have shown the virtues of citizens, as often as accident or civil troubles have brought them on a stage, from which among all nations the pride of men had repulsed them?

It has been said that women, notwithstanding much wit, judgment, and a faculty of reasoning carried as far as it has been by subtle dialecticians, have never been guided by what is called reason. This remark is untrue. They are not guided, it is true, by the reason of men, but they are guided by their own. Their interests not being the same by the defect of the laws, and the same things not having

for them the same importance as for us, they may without failing in reason, make up their minds on other principles, and aim at a different end. It is not more unreasonable for a woman to take pains about her personal appearance, than it was for Demosthenes to take pains with his voice and his gesticulation.

It has been said that women, though better than men, more gentle, more sensitive, less subject to the harsher and more egoistic sort of vices, have not the sentiment of justice; that they obey feeling rather than conscience. This remark is more near being true, but it proves nothing. It is not nature, it is education, it is the manner of social life, which is the cause of this difference. Neither one nor the other has accustomed women to the idea of what is just, but only to the idea of what is amiable. Banished from affairs, from everything that is settled according to rigorous justice and positive laws, the matters with which they occupy themselves are precisely those which are ruled by natural amiability and by feeling. It is hardly fair, therefore, to allege as a ground for continuing to deny women the enjoyment of their natural rights, reasons which only possess a certain amount of substance because women do not enjoy these rights.

If we admitted such arguments against women, we must also deprive of the franchise the part of the people which, devoted to incessant labour, can neither acquire light nor exercise its reason, and soon we should come, step by step, to such a pass as only to permit citizenship in men who had gone through a course of public law. If we admit such principles, we must as a necessary consequence renounce the whole idea of a free constitution. The various aristocracies have only had similar pretexts for foundation or for excuse; the etymology of the word proves it.

You cannot bring forward the subjection of wives to their husbands, because, in the first place, it would be possible at the same time to destroy this tyranny of the civil law; and, in the second, one injustice can never be a reason for perpetrating another.

There only remain two objections to discuss. In truth, they only oppose to the admission of women to the right of citizenship motives of utility, which cannot outweigh a genuine right. The contrary maxim has too often been the excuse and pretext of tyrants; it is in the name of utility that commerce and industry groan in fetters, and that the African remains devoted to slavery; it was in the name of public utility that the Bastille was crowded with prisoners, that

censors were appointed over books, that legal procedure was kept secret, that the torture was applied. Still, we may, as well discuss these objections, so as to leave nothing unanswered.

We should have to dread, it is said, the influence of women over men.

We reply, to begin with, that this influence, like every other, is much more to be feared when used in private than in public discussion; that the influence which may be peculiar to women would lose all the more by this; as, if it extends over more than one individual, it cannot be durable after it is known. Again, as hitherto, women have never been admitted in any country to an absolute equality, as their empire has none the less for this existed everywhere, and the lower women have been placed by the laws, the more dangerous it has been, it does not seem as if we ought to have much confidence in this remedy. Is it not probable, on the contrary, that this empire would diminish, if women had less interest in maintaining it, if it ceased to be for them the only means of defending themselves, and of escaping from oppression? If politeness prevents most men from upholding their opinion against a woman in society, it is a politeness that has a good deal to do with pride; they yield a victory which has no consequences; defeat does not humiliate, because it is regarded as voluntary. Does anybody seriously suppose that it would be the same in a public discussion on an important subject? Does politeness prevent people from pleading a cause in the courts against a woman?

But, we shall be told, this change would be contrary to general utility, because it would draw women away from the tasks that nature seems to have reserved for them.

This objection does not seem very well grounded. Whatever constitution is set up, it is certain that in the existing state of the civilisation of European nations, there will never be more than a very small number of citizens able to occupy themselves with public business. You would not be tearing women away from their house-keeping, any more than you tear the labourer from his plough or the artisan from his workshop. In the richer classes, we never see the women surrendering themselves to domestic cares in so continuous a manner, that we need be afraid of distracting their attention from them; and a serious occupation would certainly distract women from them much less than the futile tastes to which idleness and bad education condemn them.

The principal cause of this apprehension is the idea that every man admitted to enjoy the franchise thinks henceforth of nothing but governing; which may be true, to a certain extent, at the moment when a constitution is being established. But this stir and agitation could not be permanent. In the same way, we must not suppose that, because women might possibly be members of national assemblies, they would on the spot abandon their children, their households, their needle. They would be all the more fit to bring up their children and to form men. It is natural that the woman should suckle her children, and should attend to their first years. Kept to the house by these tasks, and being physically weaker than man, it is natural further that she should lead a more retired and domestic life. So women would be in the same class as the men, who are obliged by their position to attend to a business for a certain number of hours. This may be a good reason for not preferring them in the elections, but it cannot be the foundation of a legal exclusion. Gallantry would lose by this change, but domestic manners would gain by that, as by every other equality.

Hitherto all known nations have had barbarous or corrupt manners and customs. The only exception that I know of must be made in favour of the Americans of the United States, who are spread in a small number over a large territory. Hitherto, among all nations, legal inequality has existed between men and women; and it would not be hard to prove that in these two phenomena, equally general the second is one of the principal causes of the first. For inequality necessarily introduces corruption, and is the most common, where it is not the only, cause of it.

It is singular enough that in many countries women should have been counted incapable of every public function, yet worthy of royalty; that in France a woman could have been regent, and that up to 1776 she could not be a *marchande de modes* at Paris; that, in fine, in the elective assemblies of our bailliages, that should have been accorded to a right of the fief which was denied to the right of nature. Several of our noble deputies owe to ladies the honour of sitting among the representatives of the nation. Why, instead of taking away this right from the owners of fiefs, not extend it to all those who have property, who are householders?

With reference to Condorcet's argument at the top of page

369, it would be astonishing, if we did not remember the omnipotence of prejudice, how many clever men suppose that they are discussing the justice of giving the franchise to women, by asserting in a variety of forms that past history and present experience prove that men are superior to women. The meaninglessness of their proposition is evident the moment they come to quantify it. Surely not *all* men are superior to *all* women; the stupidest man to the ablest woman; one of the Dorsetshire male serfs to George Sand? If not, then what men are superior to what women?

It may be well, as we are at translation, to reproduce the passage in which Plato has dealt with this.

Many women are superior to many women in many things. So there is no function, my friend, says Socrates, proper to those who administer the city, which belongs especially to a woman, because she is a woman, nor to a man because he is a man, but their natures are distributed alike among both creatures, and a woman shares in all functions, as a man shares in all; but in all woman is weaker than man. Shall we then assign all functions to men, and to women none?

I do not quite follow.

Well, you will agree in this, that one woman has a turn for doctoring, and another has not; that one is musical by constitution, and another unmusical?

Certainly.

And one fond of athletic games and fighting, and another peaceful and not fond of athletics?

True.

Well, and you find women who love knowledge, and women who hate it; and women with spirit and women without spirit?

Yes, that is so.

Then there are women with the qualities required for a Guardian, and others without them. And this is just the conclusion we came to about men. So the constitution and character of men and

women are the same, as far as the guardianship of the city goes ; only lighter offices will be imposed on women than on men, on account of the inferior physical strength of the former. Our projects, therefore, were far from being impracticable and visionary, for the law we proposed was conformable to nature, and it is the existing system which is against nature.—(Republ., Bk. v. 455. D. . . . 457.)

In short, Plato's view was that the best men excel the best women, but that the best women excel all men below the second-best ; and that women have as many individual differences of taste and capacity as men have.

It is an interesting fact in the history of French opinion upon the position of women, that so far back as 1673 there was published in Paris by a *Sieur de P.*, a little volume, entitled *De l'Egalité des Deux Sexes, Discours Physique et Moral, où l'on voit l'importance de se Défaire de Préjugés*. The reasons for accepting this equality have never been stated with calmer or more rational force, and the writer, whoever he was, had the courage to maintain the equal fitness of women with men for all offices, including those of Prince, Preacher, and General. "Pour moy," he says (p. 168), "je ne serois pas plus surpris de voir une femme le casque en teste, que de luy voir une Couronne : présider dans un Conseil de Guerre, comme dans celui d'un Etat ; exercer elle-même ses soldats, ranger une armée en bataille, la partager en plusieurs corps, comme elle se divertiroit à le voir faire. L'Art Militaire n'a rien pardessus les autres, dont les femmes sont capables. Une femme peut inventer des stratagèmes pour surprendre l'ennemy, luy mettre le vent, la poussière, le soleil, en face," &c. Joan of Arc, the Countess of Derby, and other women, are cases in point. If it be said that physical strength is inadequate, the

doubter may be referred to the well-known passage where Macaulay describes the physical weakness of William III. and his enemy, Luxembourg.

The writer gives a singularly good account of the way in which in primitive times the idea of male supremacy would be likely to arise. It was, in fact, owing to the operation of Natural selection. Women, in seasons of pregnancy and lactation, would be less capable than men of carrying on the struggle of subsistence, and would therefore have died out, if they had not been essential to the appetites of their male companions. That the idea of superiority should arise from this was natural enough among barbarians. Its continuance in communities that, like some of those of our own time, have made partial advances towards high civilisation, is more wonderful.

THE END.



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